Carbon Navigator deadline looming

As part of the requirements of the Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP), each applicant must complete a carbon navigator by 31 October 2016. This deadline is fast approaching and programme applicants are encouraged to make arrangements with their agricultural adviser to complete the carbon navigator as soon as possible. The purpose of the carbon navigator is to assess the impact of your farming system on the climate in terms of carbon footprint. Measuring the carbon footprint of each participating herd through defined metrics, such as calving interval, length of grazing season and slurry application, is key to implementing changes to improve efficiency in such areas and to reduce the carbon footprint of your herd. The Carbon Navigator will play a key role in this.

WHAT IS A CARBON NAVIGATOR?
The Carbon Navigator is an online farm management package developed by Bord Bia and Teagasc. It quantifies the environmental gains that can be made on each applicant’s farm. It is a very useful and simple tool which allows an individual farmer to look at changes which can be made on their farm in areas such as the length of the grazing season and average calving interval. It then illustrates what that change would mean in terms of reduced GHG emissions.

HOW THIS WILL BE DONE
Each BDGP participant must complete the Carbon Navigator by 31 October this year. The first completion of the Carbon Navigator is expected to take two hours and must be undertaken in conjunction with an approved adviser. There is no farmer cost to completing this as the cost is covered separately under the RDP and so advisers are paid directly by the Department.

FARMER FOCUS: TOMMY HOLMES, BALLINA, CO MAYO

“Carbon Navigator identified areas for improvement”

Tommy Holmes, Tullysleva, Ballina, Co Mayo. Tommy recently completed a Carbon Navigator with his Teagasc advisor as part of the BDGP requirements.

Tommy Holmes runs a 15-cow suckler herd outside of Ballina, Co Mayo. As part of the BDGP requirements, Tommy recently completed a Carbon Navigator with his local Teagasc adviser. We ask Tommy about his experience of the Carbon Navigator and the areas for improvement that it identified.

What is the breeding strategy for your herd?
I try to produce good-quality maternal females first and foremost, whilst also trying to maintain good growth and carcase traits in males for slaughter. My calving season runs generally from August through to Christmas. I use 100% AI and it has been working well for me. My best females are selected as replacements to calve down at 24 months and surplus females are slaughtered.

I don’t believe in selling on females that I don’t consider good enough for breeding in my own herd. The males are slaughtered as bulls preferably at 16 months.

You recently completed a Carbon Navigator. How did you find it?
I didn’t know too much about it beforehand, but the adviser was a big help. He asked me the relevant questions and I provided the answers as accurately as I could. We were able to get a lot of the data from my ICBF HerdPlus account. I can see the benefit of sitting down with an agricultural adviser to do the Carbon Navigator as I would have found it difficult to complete on my own and to interpret the results afterwards.

What were the main areas for improvement identified by the Carbon Navigator?
There were three main areas identified really, the first one was to try to extend the grazing season by about three weeks. I’ll try to get cattle out 10 days earlier in spring and house 10 days later in autumn. Of course, weather can play a big part in this. The second was to increase my calves/cow/year figure. Improved management and genetics should achieve this. The third was to try and utilise all of my slurry in the spring. I spread more slurry this past spring than I had done in previous years and I could see a big difference in grass growth as a result.

Q & A

Q. When must I have the Carbon Navigator completed by?
Each BDGP applicant must have completed the Carbon Navigator by 31 October 2016.

Q. Who do I contact to complete the Carbon Navigator and how much will it cost me?
You will have to complete the Carbon Navigator with an approved agricultural adviser. Approved advisers have completed a specific training course for this. A list of approved advisers is available on the Department of Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.ie/beefschemes/. You will not have to pay any money to the adviser. DAFM will pay the adviser directly.

Q. Will I receive notification when I can to meet my adviser to complete the Carbon Navigator?
No, the onus is on the applicant to contact an approved adviser to make an appointment to complete the Carbon Navigator. You are encouraged to do this as soon as possible.