O

n Friday last, 16
September, Minister
for Agriculture Food
and the Marine
launched genomic Beef
Euro-Star
Indexes. This is a
significant milestone for
beef breeding in
Ireland as it sees the incorpo-
rating of genomic data into
Irish beef indexes for the
first time. The publication of
genomic beef indexes is the
end result of many years of
data collection and research
by ICBF, Teagasc and
the DAFM. This research
has been supported by a spe-
cial advisory committee
made up of world-leading experts
in the field of genomics.

The Numbers
Over 445,000 beef animals
now have a genomic index
and over the course of the Beef
Data & Genomics Programme
(BDGP) this number will rise
to over two million, with
over 300,000 animals being
picked up annually for
genotyping as part of the
programme requirements. Of
the 445,000 animals with a
 genomic index, 382,000 are
males and 63,000 are
females (primarily AI
and stock bulls). Approximately
63% of the 382,000 genotyped
females are four- or five-star
on the Replacement Index, with
the remainder being one-, two-
or three-star animals.

Something which farmers
have been giving a lot of
attention to is the €uro
value cut-off figures for
the various star ratings in
the Replacement Index. The
four-star cut-off figure has
dropped from €74 to €73,
while the five-star cut-off has
dropped from €98 to €92.

Genomic and non-
genomic indexes
Updates have been made to
online facilities and reports
to highlight animals that have
a genomic index. The ICBF
Animal Search now displays a
green bar above the animal’s
Euro-Star Index which
confirms that the animal has
a genomic index included in its
evaluation. Animals that don’t
have a green bar do not have a
genomic index.

Online herd profiles
(www.icbf.com) have a
new column heading “Genomic Eval”
with a “Yes” or “No”
denoting whether
the animal has a genomic
index. Some animals may
have been sampled on farm
but their genotype may not yet
have been processed. Provided
there are no issues with the
 genotype, these animals will
have genomics included in the
next evaluation run.

The report
What will be of most interest
to farmers will be the impact
which genomics has had on
the Euro-Star Indexes of their
own animals. All online facili-
ties such as the ICBF Animal
Search and Euro-Star profiles
have been updated with the
August 2016 indexes. The lat-
est BDGP report will be posted
to all BDGP applicants from
the week beginning 3 October.
The report will have the latest
Euro-Star Indexes. The report
will also include the genomics
status of each animal in the
herd. There are three different
status:
DNA Requested – DNA
sample requested but not yet
returned from farm.
DNA Returned – DNA sample
returned from farm and is
currently being processed.

Genomic Evaluation – Animal
has genomics included in its
Euro-Star Index.

Benefit to farmers and the
industry
There will be undoubtedly
benefits to the introduction of
genomics to beef Euro-Star
indexes. For farmers, the most
notable ones are:
The increase in reliability
figures for young animals which
will allow farmers to select fu-
ture breeding stock with more
confidence.
Confirmed parentage elimi-
nating future potential inbreed-
ing issues.
Identification of animals
 carrying undesirable genetic
defects. Farmers can then
 avoid mating animals carrying
the same defects.

The benefits for the wider
industry may also be significant,
most notably the increased lev-
els of traceability that genom-
ics will bring about. Ireland is
the first country in the world
to introduce genomics on such
a scale for beef animals. This
will be a significant factor in
the future marketing of Irish beef.

If you have any queries on
the latest genomic indexes
please contact ICBF on 023-
882 0452 or email query@icbf.
com.

Q & A
Q. When will I receive my updated BDGP Euro-Star report?
A. Reports will be generated in the coming week and will be
posted to participating herds from the week beginning 3 October.
Reports will be arriving on farms over the following
two to three weeks. The ICBF online animal search and all
online profiles have been updated with the August 2016
indexes. Farmers can generate a new BDGP Euro-Star report through
their HerdPlus login.

Q. Why do none of the animals which I tagged in 2016
have genomic indexes?
A. When I send off samples are returned, the DNA must
be extracted and the resultant DNA information must be
collected and sent to ICBF. This data must then be added to the
Euro-Star Index of the animal. This is done through a
process called a genetic evaluation. ICBF carries out
genetic evaluations three times per year (April, Aug &
Dec). Unfortunately, most of the 2016 samples were not
returned in time for the August evaluation. These animals will,
however, receive a genomic proof in the December genetic
evaluation run. The new BDGP Euro-Star report will tell you
the exact status of an animal’s DNA sample.

FARMER FOCUS: SEAN McSWEENEY
Name: Sean McSweeney, Macroom, Co Cork
Farming system: Suckler to weaning/finisher
Four- and five-star females: Cows: 68; Heifers: 32.
Stock bull or AI? Stock bull.

Replacement Strategy: Breed all of my own.
Sean McSweeney runs a 100-cow suckler herd
outside of Macroom, Co Cork. Minister for
Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed
last week launched genomic Beef Euro-Star
indexes on Sean’s farm. We catch up with Sean for an
insight into his farming system.

What is your farming system?
The calving pattern is mixed between spring and
autumn. Under my current system, I am selling
bulls as weanlings and I am taking the heifers
to slaughter at about 20 months. I have two
Limousin stock bulls. The older bull is sired by
Bavardage (AGB) with a Replacement Index of
€111. The younger bull is sired by Neuf (NUF)
with a Replacement Index of €97. My father and
brother run a dairy herd on the home farm and
I generally source my replacements from here.
I may start to retain some of my own heifers as
replacements in future. I have introduced Speck-
ed Park replacements into the herd over the last
year and I am very pleased with them.

What is your routine around data recording?
I record all of my data through the survey forms.
I wouldn’t be the best on a computer and I just
find the forms convenient for me. The forms
allow me walk through the animals outside while
I complete the docility and quality scores. The
freepost envelopes are included with the forms
which makes it quick and easy to return them
when completed.

Launch of genomics
When I got the phone call a number of weeks ago
I was only too happy to oblige. I was delighted to
have the Minister for Agriculture on my farm.
I think the BDGP will bring huge benefits for suck-
ler farming and I was delighted to be able to play
a part in promoting it.

FARMS FAR FROM BEING GENOMICS FREE