

Beef data recording

The major benefit of genomics to beef Euro-Star Indexes is the increase in reliability which it will bring about before an animal has any performance data recorded on it. Genomics will not, however, replace the need for high levels of accurate performance data to be recorded on stock in order to increase reliability figures even more. Genomics will simply make it easier to identify animals with greater genetic potential from an earlier age, but it is the subsequent performance data which will confirm this. This is why farmers are required to record data such as calving difficulty, cow milkability, calf quality, etc, as part of the BDGP.

Teagasc Beef Conference

The Teagasc National Beef Conference took place on Tuesday last in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone. One of the sessions, entitled "Breeding Suckler Cows to Maximise Profitability", was focused on how genetic indexes can be used as a tool by farmers to make more informed breeding decisions. There were three speakers in this session: ➔Thierry Pabiou, ICBF, gave a presentation on the French performance recording and genetic evaluation system. The French suckler herd is made up of four million mainly purebred cows. Approximately 500,000 of these cows are involved in performance recording whereby the performance of the calf is assessed at weaning time. The French breeding programme is very much focused on weanling production and less on carcass performance. Genetic trends show that while significant gains have been made in growth, there has also been an increase in calving difficulty.

➔David Clarke (profiled opposite) presented on his experiences of data recording and how it benefits his farming system. It was clear that recording high levels of accurate data was something that he was passionate about. As a result of recording so much data, David feels that the Euro-Star Indexes give a fair reflection of the performance of his cows on the ground.

➔Donagh Berry, Teagasc, gave a presentation entitled "Squeezing more benefits out of genomics". The main benefit associated with genomics is the increase in reliability in genetic indexes. Donagh demonstrated the many other benefits that genomics can bring for Irish farmers such as verifying parentage, traceability, better mating decisions and identifying animals carrying lethal genes and defects.

The recurring theme throughout all of the presentations was the need for sustained flows of accurate on-farm data to ensure the continuous increase in index reliabilities and to further improve the effectiveness of genomics. The BDGP has ensured that these important data flows will continue over the next number of years. Farmers need to ensure that data is submitted on time each year and that it is recorded as accurately as possible. Accurate data recorded by farmers will mean accurate Euro-Star Indexes at the other end.

Weaning weights

In France, approximately 1.3m weights are collected on suckler calves each year. All of these weights are recorded on farm. In Ireland, approximately 300,000 weights are collected on suckler calves each year, but the majority of these are mart weights. Less than 20,000 calves are weighed on-farm each year in Ireland. Weight-recording calves is something that all suckler farmers should consider doing. On-farm weights will allow farmers to make better management decisions and will also significantly increase the reliability figures on the Euro-Star Indexes of cows.

Tissue Tags

Just under 90% of 2016 BDGP tissue tags have been returned to date. This is excellent progress and BDGP applicants who have yet to return tags are encouraged to do so ASAP in order to receive genomic evaluations in the December evaluation run. If you have any questions please contact ICBF on 1850 625 626 or email query@icbf.com.



David and Emmet Clarke, Cabra, Thurles, Co Tipperary, with some of their beef herd.

Q&A

Q. How will recording more data benefit my herd?

The reliability percentages for an animal's Euro-Star Index increase as more data becomes available on that animal. Therefore, the more information that you record on your animals the more accurately the Euro-Star Index will reflect the animal's performance on the ground. This will be important when making future breeding decisions.

Q. I would like to start weight recording my calves but I don't have a weighing scales.

The average suckler herd size in Ireland is approximately 17 cows and many farmers may not be able to justify the cost of purchasing weighing scales. ICBF has a weighing service with technicians located all over the country. For more information, go to www.icbf.com or call 023-882 0452.

FARMER FOCUS: DAVID CLARKE

Data driving output

Name: David Clarke, Thurles, Co Tipperary
Farming System: Suckler to store/slaughter.
4 and 5 Star Females: Cows: 42; Heifers: 50.
Stock Bull or AI: AI with stock bull mopping up.
Replacement Strategy: Breed my own.

David Clarke runs a 60-cow, spring-calving suckler herd in Thurles, Co Tipperary. David places huge emphasis on recording accurate performance data on his stock and he spoke at the Teagasc Beef Conference last Tuesday about his experiences with data recording and how it has benefited him.

What is your farming system?

I calve from the end of February to end of April. I also have 260 mid-season lambing ewes and about 10ha of barley. I use AI for the first six weeks of the breeding season, with a stock bull mopping up for four to six weeks. I usually have about 75% of the herd in calf to AI. As I use a lot of Gene Ireland straws, I sell a lot of my bull weanlings to the ICBF progeny test centre in Tully every year. I finish the rest of the bulls myself. I breed all my own replacements and surplus heifers are finished at 21 to 25 months.

Describe your data recording routine?

At calving, I record the compulsory data as well as the calving difficulty and sire. I also record birth weights. I have a scales and a special pen set up in the calving shed for this purpose. The extra BDGP data, such as calf size and vigour, is also recorded. All calves are weighed from 150 to 250 days of age. I weigh animals before slaughter, which gives me killout percentages. I



David Clarke, Thurles, Co Tipperary.

pregnancy-scan my cows in late summer. I record data in the BDGP pocket notebook before recording it online.

How has this data helped you?

Knowing as much as possible about my animals is important to me. I want to be able to assess the performance of my animals in a scientific way. The more information I have, the more informed management decisions I can make which help me to improve output and profitability.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

➔31 October: Deadline for completion of the Carbon Navigator as part of the BDGP requirements. Please make arrangements to complete the Carbon Navigator with an approved adviser asap. For a list of approved advisers, go to <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/beefschemas/>