

1. Important Dates

Tuesday 9th June. Irish Grasslands Assn Sheep Meeting. This meeting will feature recent developments by Sheep Ireland. Johnstown, Co. Kilkenny. If you would like to attend please contact Joanne at 1890 843 442.

Tuesday 30th June. Irish Grassland Assn Beef Meeting.

Wednesday 1st July. Dairy Genetic Evaluation Consultation meeting. Moorepark from 10:30 to 14:00.

2. Update from Chief Executive - Brian Wickham

Beef Breeding Priorities

We are currently reviewing priorities for our beef breeding activities. The focus of the review is on ensuring the rate of genetic gain in the national beef herd is accelerated. The review is covering GROW[®], beef Genetic Evaluations, GEN[®]IRLAND[®] which includes Tully and our services to beef Breed Assns. A number of service improvements that result in a more effective breeding program for each breed are expected as a result. More details will be provided in due course.

Animal Health Ireland (AHI)

An AHI stakeholders meeting was held yesterday. AHI are making excellent progress with finalising the articles of association for the new entity and have advertised for a permanent Chief Executive. A basis for funding is nearing finalisation and technical working groups have been formed to address a range of health issues. Considering that AHI was only recently formed it is very encouraging to see it progressing so rapidly under the leadership of Mike Magan and the acting Chief Executive Joe O'Flaherty.

Irish farmers face a number of animal health issues which impact profitability. AHI have a very important role to play in helping farmers deal with these issues. The key role for AHI is in co-ordinating the efforts of the many organisations working to help farmers reduce the losses associated with diseases.

ICBF Database Questions & Answers

Over the last few months I have been getting an increasing number of questions from other countries about the ICBF database. Below are the questions and answers I provided for one country this week.

1. Can we just purchase this system (a national cattle breeding database) off someone else?

The simple answer is "no". The reason is that the volume of sales for such systems is so small that it is not worth any organization making the investment in a system that is flexible enough to meet the requirements of any country. Instead, we all develop our own and cater for the peculiarities of our own country/business/organization.

2. Why did ICBF develop a custom database system?

We initially (1999) purchased the IRIS system from CR Delta and modified it to meet our requirements. Our thinking at the time was that we could get up and running faster that way, than starting a development from scratch. To do the customizations we created a team of six/seven developers at ICBF. Over time these developers replaced virtually the entire IRIS system. The main drivers were performance (getting the system to work fast enough) and ensuring our system was user-friendly. The latter is probably the long term justification for retaining the capability to develop and evolve the system. We have also moved to more standard development tools – Oracle, PHP (web), and Streamserve (for reports).

IRIS was developed as a generic animal recording database which could support the needs of multiple countries – with Ireland, South Africa and CR Delta as the initial market. As it turned out all three of us (including CR Delta) had to do so much customization that we now all have our own independent systems. However, I have no doubt that we did the right thing by starting with IRIS. If I was doing the job again I would start with somebody’s system (the best I could find) and then grow/develop it to do the new things I wanted.

3. In the development of a system where is the true value?

For us the value is in the way we can inexpensively collect and hold a very wide range of data (single copy of the truth) and then readily access it and analyze it to extract valuable information (genetic evaluation, genomic BV, location of highest EBI fetus, mobile phone number of farmers in a locality, etc etc etc). It is a tool that facilitates the breeding of better cattle for Irish farmers. With genomic selection the value has been further reinforced – firstly, we have the data needed to evaluate the technology and secondly the database facilitates routine use of genomic selection. We could not have moved so rapidly to implement genomic selection without the database.

4. In the development of a system where is the true cost?

By far, the biggest cost is in the software development – that is, people time. Hardware, communications networks and software licenses are all relatively minor in comparison.

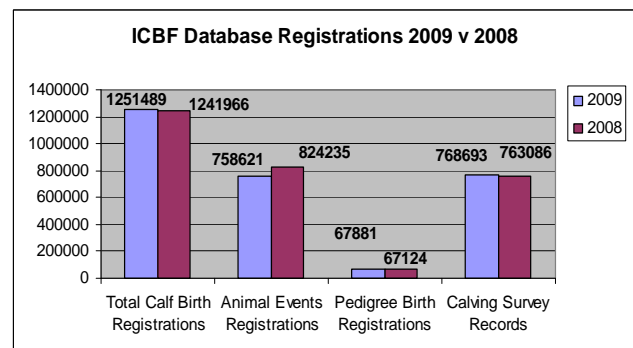
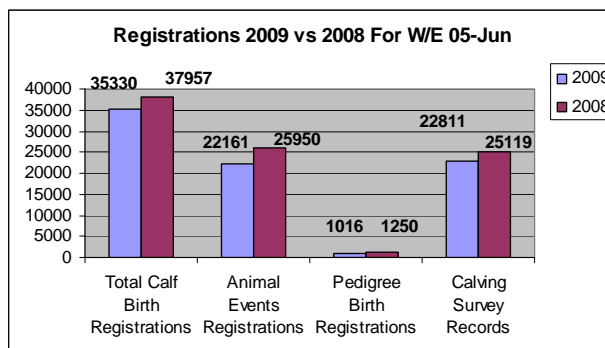
5. What are the key benefits from a custom system?

We have something much more than a “custom system”. It is a custom built system, which is shared across many organisations. The benefits are in the most amazing power to efficiently provide herd owners, and the organisations providing services to farmers, with timely and valuable information to help the farmer make better cattle breeding and other decisions. This comes on the back of low cost data collection systems that are real time or very close to real time. By sharing between many organisations the overhead costs are well spread. We are able to maintain and operate a very sophisticated shared and customized system.

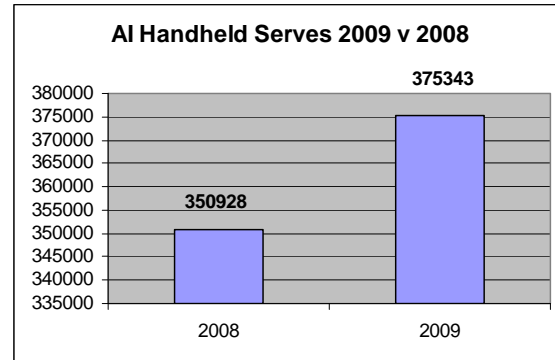
6. What are the key disadvantages of a custom system?

The key issue is not with the custom system but rather with the shared database. Customization does require a good team of developers and there is always a risk of getting too dependent on one or two specialists who have all the knowledge. This must be avoided and can be if the team has sufficient size and stability. The shared database issues are all around data ownership and funding. We manage the ownership issue with a few very important principles including: the farmer controls who has access to the farm data, all data is available for research, and we comply with provisions of data protection legislation (data can only be used with permission for a stated purpose). The funding issues are handled by a sharing of costs between multiple beneficiaries – service users pay fees, farmers in general contribute through tags and the general public contribute through DAFF funding. Share holders in 2000 contributed initial capital for ICBF and since then have not been called on to make a further investment.

3. Database



- ✚ The revised 2009 suckler forms (pre and post weaning) continue to go out to farmers. In relation to 2008 born calves, the number of calves with a meal feeding introduction has increased to 794,000, with just over 700,000 of these having been weaned.
- ✚ The revamp of the Milk Recording system continues. Progress has picked up again this week, and next week we will be re-engaging with Munster milk recording.
- ✚ Work on a new mechanism of sending and receiving Suckler scheme data to DAFF is continuing, and will be completed by the end of June.
- ✚ Development on the sheep genetic evaluation extracts has been largely completed, with just some minor adjustments on-going.
- ✚ The graph shows Inseminations recoded on AI Handhelds in 2009 compared with 2008. There are more technicians using the handhelds in 2009 than there were in 2008, so even though the number of inseminations recorded is up, it looks like the overall inseminations for the season will be down.



4. Tully

- ✚ All breeders who's animals did not meet the health testing criteria to get a bull into Tully for the current intake were posted out the results of the testing. It is hoped that this information will be valuable for breeders in addressing diseases such as IBR along with veterinary advice.
- ✚ All bulls were again tested for IBR this week as part of their pre-entry isolation, with bulls currently being built up to ad-lib receiving 4-5 kilos of concentrates and 3 Kg/Dry matter of hay per day.
- ✚ Two tours visited Tully this week with one comprising of a group made up of 3 Scottish Universities and the other an English group made up of beef breeders. They were given a talk on the centre, ICBF role in beef breeding and G-EN-Ireland program and I received a lot of positive feedback on the benefits of providing such detailed information simply to farmers to help them make the best decisions in terms of breeding for their herd and what animals are best suited to their production system.
- ✚ Unfortunately due to our bio-security they were not allowed to walk through the facilities and thus did not get the visual aspect but I had information and pictures on boards which were very useful.

5. Sheep Ireland

- ✚ Work on the genetic evaluation system, including data checking and loading, continues.
- ✚ Draft initial Breeding Values are now also starting to be generated.
- ✚ Live weight and ultrasonic records continue to come in. All of the early lambing flocks have now been visited.
- ✚ A new 'Reports' section has been developed and launched. It can be found under the 'Inventory' section of the website.
- ✚ The main objective of these reports is to give the Flockowner a printable record of what data has been loaded.
- ✚ The data from the 'Lambing' report may also be used to register lambs in certain flockbooks.
- ✚ Preparation is ongoing for the IGA sheep conference that is being held next Tuesday the 9th of June.



6. Genetic Evaluations

International Beef

- ✚ The InterBeef group is preparing the working group meeting schedule for August 2009 where the results of the spring prototype evaluation will be discussed and validated.
- ✚ The conversion formulae are finished for the Charolais breed. The results will be put in a spreadsheet format and distributed to the beef industry.

7. Milk Recording

National Milk Recording Results by County - 10 day Period 26/05/09 to 05/06/09.

	<i>No. Herds Recorded</i>	<i>No. Cows Recorded</i>	<i>Average Herd Size</i>	<i>Average 24hr Milk kg/Cow</i>	<i>Average Fat %</i>	<i>Average Protein %</i>	<i>Average F + P kg</i>	<i>Average SCC</i>
CARLOW	11	727	66	23.8	4.39	3.40	1.85	300
CAVAN	33	1700	52	24.4	3.66	3.31	1.70	342
CLARE	25	1356	54	24.8	3.63	3.19	1.69	355
CORK STH	236	15860	67	25.2	3.70	3.37	1.78	258
CORK NTH	249	18332	74	24.8	3.80	3.34	1.77	258
DONEGAL	17	1730	102	24.1	4.03	3.24	1.75	300
DUBLIN	5	325	65	29.1	3.41	3.34	1.96	251
GALWAY	27	1538	57	27.3	3.70	3.31	1.91	303
KERRY	111	6840	62	26.2	3.66	3.21	1.80	323
KILDARE	17	1470	86	27.3	3.58	3.33	1.89	238
KILKENNY	36	2521	70	24.7	3.76	3.36	1.76	211
LAOIS	28	1834	66	25.0	3.79	3.36	1.79	357
LEITRIM	6	316	53	23.9	3.75	3.20	1.66	263
LIMERICK	90	6150	68	25.8	3.67	3.24	1.78	350
LONGFORD	7	374	53	25.0	3.61	3.19	1.70	387
LOUTH	15	1635	109	29.8	3.75	3.33	2.11	336
MAYO	34	1759	52	29.1	3.20	3.36	1.91	445
MEATH	44	4359	99	23.7	3.95	3.25	1.71	400
MONAGHAN	31	1428	46	26.2	3.59	3.30	1.81	344
OFFALY	14	1011	72	26.0	3.90	3.35	1.89	328
ROSCOMMON	1	30	30	29.3	3.42	3.14	1.92	141
SLIGO	9	340	38	28.8	3.39	3.49	1.98	283
TIPPERARY NTH	50	4425	89	22.6	4.18	3.40	1.71	316
TIPPERARY STH	67	5267	79	23.4	3.87	3.38	1.70	256
WATERFORD	40	3931	98	25.2	3.92	3.37	1.84	329
WESTMEATH	17	1097	65	23.2	3.82	3.37	1.67	235
WEXFORD	47	3586	76	25.3	3.63	3.39	1.78	225
WICKLOW E	11	874	79	24.8	3.49	3.31	1.69	247
WICKLOW W	5	363	73	23.5	3.79	3.30	1.67	212
	<i>No. Herds Recorded</i>	<i>No. Cows Recorded</i>	<i>Average Herd Size</i>	<i>Average 24hr Milk kg/Cow</i>	<i>Average Fat %</i>	<i>Average Protein %</i>	<i>Average F + P kg</i>	<i>Average SCC</i>
National	1,283	91,178	69	25.6	3.73	3.31	1.80	296

National Milk Recording Averages by Province - 10 day Period 26/05/09 to 05/06/09.								
Provincial	No. Herds Recorded	No. Cows Recorded	Average Herd Size	Average 24hr Milk kg/Cow	Average Fat %	Average Protein %	Average F + P kg	Average SCC
Munster	868	62,161	72	24.8	3.72	3.31	1.74	306
Leinster	257	20,176	79	25.5	3.62	3.33	1.77	287
Connacht	77	3,983	52	27.7	3.71	3.30	1.94	287
Ulster	81	4,858	60	24.9	3.80	3.28	1.76	329

National Milk Recording Statistics - Herds, Cows & EDIY 05/06/09						
Milk Recording Organisation	Total Herds Recorded YTD 05/06/09	No. EDIY Herds YTD 05/06/09	% Herds EDIY	Total No. Cows Recorded YTD 05/06/09	No. EDIY Cows YTD 05/06/09	% Cows EDIY
Progressive	2,007	796	40%	156,007	59,632	38%
Dairygold	1,469	540	37%	104,205	39,569	38%
Kerry	870	64	7%	56,158	3,572	6%
SWS	873	110	13%	55,844	7,467	13%
Tipperary	129	50	39%	9,883	4,250	43%
Arrabawn	137	113	82%	10,427	8,795	84%
Connacht	123	38	31%	7,360	2,141	29%
Donegal	23	23	100%	2,547	2,547	100%
Total	5,631	1,734	31%	402,431	127,973	32%

Recorded Cows by Milk Recording Organisation - Year on Year Comparison			
Milk Recording Organisation	YTD 2008 Cows Recorded 01/01/08 - 05/06/08	YTD 2009 Cows Recorded 01/01/09 - 05/06/09	2009 vs 2008 Year on Year Difference (%)
Progressive	160,543	156,007	-2.9%
Dairygold	104,353	104,205	-0.1%
Kerry	71,426	56,158	-27.2%
SWS	56,063	55,844	-0.4%
Tipperary	11,424	9,883	-15.6%
Arrabawn	11,446	10,427	-9.8%
Connacht	7,452	7,360	-1.3%
Donegal	3,047	2,547	-19.6%
Total	425,754	402,431	-5.8%

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