



**UPDATE – for period 11<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

**1 Important Dates**

- ✚ **30 May – 1 June, ICAR Workshop, Verona, Italy.**
- ✚ **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June, Moorepark Open Day.**
- ✚ **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June, ICBF Board Meeting.**
- ✚ **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July, ICBF Beef Breeding Industry Consultation Meeting, Abbeyleix.**

**2 Beef Breeding**

Beef cattle breeding is currently the focus of ICBF's efforts. As we work through all the issues associated with delivering a dramatic improvement in beef breeding it is worth reflecting on what it takes to have a world class beef breeding program.

The ICBF commissioned research study on beef breeding schemes for Ireland identified that an optimal scheme involves a central performance test (e.g. Tully) and a progeny test of 100 bulls per year. This would increase the rate of genetic progress from the current €5 per year to €18 per year. This increase would give a cumulative contribution to beef industry profit of €100 million per year by 2014.

The potential is enormous. What needs to be done to deliver this?

In the optimal breeding scheme design the key contributors are:

- **Pedigree breeders** who control the breeding of the elite cows, provide the stock bulls used by commercial herds, and invest significantly in breeding lines through imports.
- **Performance test herds** where data is collected on the performance of beef animals for important traits such as calving, linear scores, weaning weights, maternal traits, and carcass traits. These herds with valid contemporary groups of animals with known sires provide essential data.
- **Tully performance test centre** which brings together elite bulls and measures feed intake to narrow down the number of candidates for progeny testing through AI.
- **GENEIRELAND®** beef which facilitates the progeny testing of beef bulls. Participating herds use semen from test bulls and **performance test** the resulting progeny for direct and maternal traits. In this way the very best bulls for use on elite pedigree cows are identified.
- **AI Centre(s)** who collect and distribute semen from bulls for widespread use. They play an important role in facilitating semen imports and progeny testing. AI is a very powerful and efficient tool for ensuring the genes carried by the best bulls are distributed widely to the commercial industry.
- **Dairy and Suckler herds** which use AI or stock bulls selected on the basis of Euro-Star indexes to breed replacement suckler cows. These herds ensure the proliferation of genetically superior suckler cows to the commercial cattle population where the benefits of improved breeding are finally realised.
- **ICBF Database** which collects and stores data relevant to all aspects of beef cattle breeding including: identification, location, ancestry, performance, reproduction and genetic evaluations. It provides information that can be used by all sectors of the industry to when making breeding decisions.
- **Genetic Evaluation system** which uses data from the ICBF database and international sources

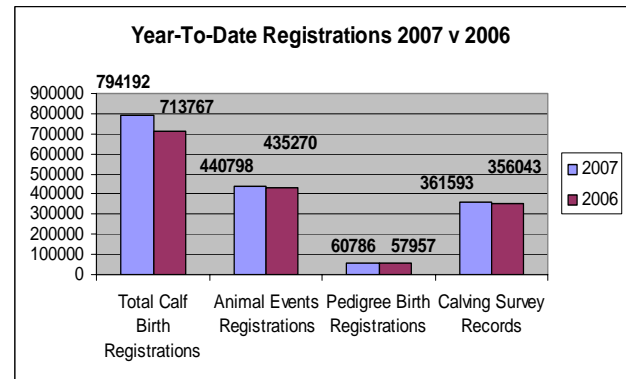
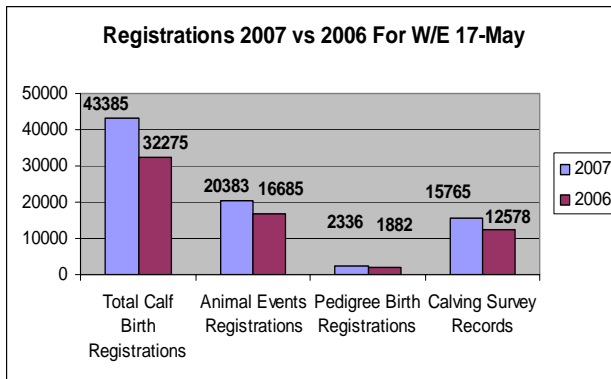


to compute Euro-Star indexes for all potential breeding stock. The Euro-Star indexes enable cattle to be ranked according to their ability to generate profits under Irish farming conditions.

These contributors overlap each other and information from the ICBF database links them all. Achieving optimal progress depends on each contributor playing their role and, if needs be, compromising in the shorter term in order to ensure a greater benefit for the industry in the longer term. If a high rate of genetic progress can be achieved the benefits are spread over the entire industry and accumulate over time. The challenge with achieving optimal rates of genetic gain is to ensure each contributor plays their role in a way that supports the overall goal of a high rate of genetic gain.

It is now time for all involved in beef cattle breeding in Ireland to ask and answer the simple question, “*what can I do to ensure Ireland has the optimal beef breeding scheme*”?

### 3 Database Update



- ✚ 174,226 inseminations have been received so far in 2007, compared with 64,354 in 2006 for the same period. This week will likely have seen the peak in the number of daily inseminations.
- ✚ A meeting with AI organisations has been tentatively scheduled for June 20<sup>th</sup> to do a review of how the handhelds have performed this season and to plan any updates that technicians/AI staff might see as beneficial.
- ✚ Some tweaks to the new Herdbook front end are continuing and a further iteration of the facility has been issued this week. A meeting with IHFA was held this week to work through some of the specific requirements on the dairy side, and the feedback was positive.
- ✚ Some work is beginning on revising the Milk Recording lab interface, with a view to reducing the duration of milk recording processing each night.
- ✚ The new season fertility reports continue to be generated on a daily basis, and are being issued to HerdPlus members.

### 4 Genetic Evaluations

#### Dairy Genetic evaluations

- ✚ The latest proofs were released to the industry on a provisional basis this week. Currently parent averaging and upload onto the database is on-going. We identified an issue with gestation length reliabilities. In order to avoid delays incurred by redoing the gestation length evaluations the proofs from the February run will be used instead. This only applies to gestation length and not to calving difficulty or mortality. The website and bull search will be updated early next week.



## Beef Genetic Evaluations

- Loading of new proofs to the database in conjunction with the dairy proofs is on-going. Please see dairy section above for update regarding gestation length. New proofs for beef bulls will be available next week.

## International Evaluations

- Conversion formulae have been established between French 2007 'IBOVAL' and Irish May 2007 proofs for Charolais and Limousine and for the following traits: direct calving difficulty, maternal calving difficulty (conversion formulae for Charolais, comparison of ranking for Limousine), direct weaning weight, maternal weaning weight (no conversion, comparison of ranking for Charolais & Limousine), carcass conformation, carcass weight, calf quality, muscle and skeletal composites.
- 6,904 Charolais & 5,803 Limousine animals present in the Irish database have been updated with these converted proofs according to specific blending rules.
- A complete report on this work is now being written and will be available shortly.

## 5 Milk Recording

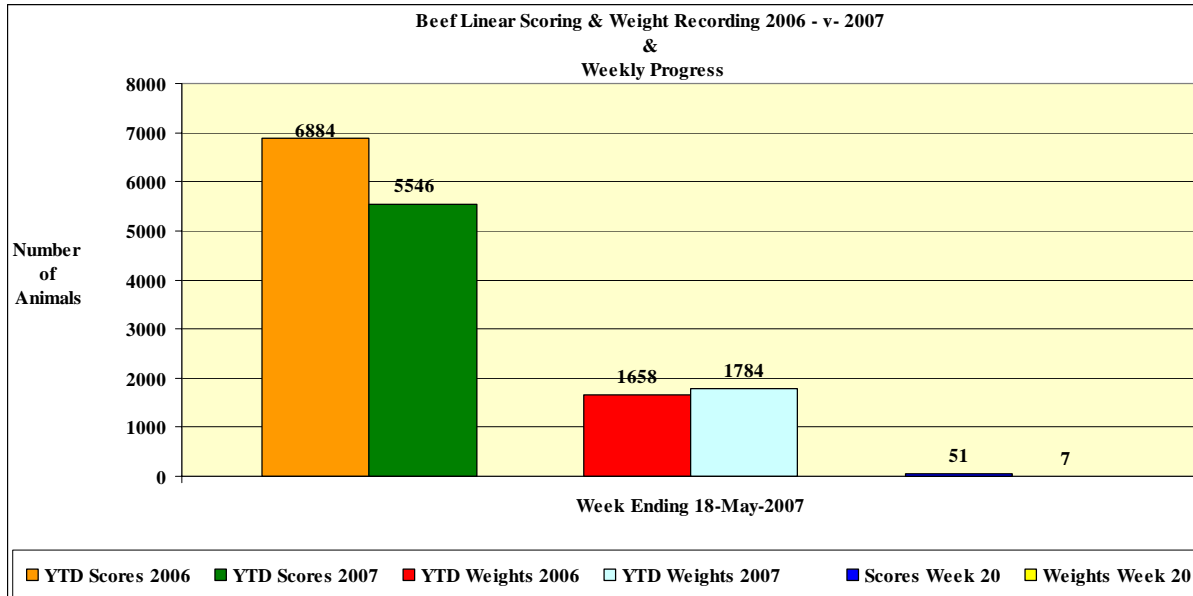
### Processing

Milk Recording Organisation	YTD 2005 Cows Recorded 01/01/05 - 18/05/05	YTD 2006 Cows Recorded 01/01/06 - 18/05/06	YTD 2007 Cows Recorded 01/01/07 - 18/05/07	2007 vs 2006 Year on Year Difference (%)
Progressive	128,841	128,079	138,393	7.5%
Dairygold	75,081	85,223	91,505	6.9%
Kerry	56,586	59,453	60,166	1.2%
SWS	47,931	50,436	52,045	3.1%
Tipperary	7,858	9,396	10,184	7.7%
Arrabawn	5,651	8,871	9,871	10.1%
Connacht	6,046	6,015	7,743	22.3%
Donegal	1,226	1,723	2,730	36.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>329,220</b>	<b>349,196</b>	<b>372,637</b>	<b>6.3%</b>

Milk Recording Organisation	2007 Herds Recorded Week 04/05/07 - 18/05/07
Progressive	434
Dairygold	285
Kerry	189
SWS	143
Arrabawn	19
Tipperary	17
Connacht	35
Donegal	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,140</b>



## 6 Beef Linear Scoring



## 7 Tully

- ✚ Three bulls left in Tully
- ✚ Washing and maintenance of all sheds has commenced.
- ✚ A review of Bio Security has commenced.
- ✚ A review of health testing procedures has commenced.

## 8 Gene Ireland

### DAIRY SPRING 2007

- ✚ The Spring Dairy programme is now complete. A total of 682 herds signed up, taking a total of 28,225 straws from 44 young bulls.
- ✚ Of these herds 423 are DIY clients and 259 use the Technician service.
- ✚ A further breakdown of the number of herds involved by programme (Holstein/Friesian and Multi pack) and quantity of straws taken is presented in the following table:

Programme/usage	No. herds
HO/FR prog. only	625
Multi prog. only	47
Both prog.	10
35 straws	579
70 straws	88
105 + straws	15

- ✚ An average of 660 doses were dispatched from the 40 HOFRR test bulls and just over 400 for the multi pack bulls (2 x Rotbunt, 1 x Mountbelliard, 1 x Friesian).



### DAIRY SPRING 2006

- ✚ Initial Calving Evaluation results are looking good for the test bulls that were used last Spring, with most bulls improving on their ancestral figures.
- ✚ On average there are 78 daughters on the ground, 35 Gestation Length records and 43 Calving Ease scores per bull.
- ✚ When compared with the number of progeny on the ground, the figures for Gestation Length and Calving ease are below expectation. On analysis of these figures, the main reasons records are being excluded from the extract are:
  - 1) no corresponding insemination data,
  - 2) no calving ease score,
  - 3) the dam is older than 5 lactations.
- ✚ With increased usage of technician handhelds, closer monitoring of insemination records and calving ease scores, and the introduction of payments for recorded inseminations and calvings on the database, this will hopefully help improve these figures going forward.

### BEEF SPRING 2007

- ✚ The Beef Gene Ireland programme was initiated earlier this month, with 10 bulls selected from those put forward by the participating AI companies.
- ✚ Currently 43 herds that have signed up and had straws dispatched this week.
- ✚ We are satisfied with the uptake to date given the late timing of the launch.
- ✚ The large farmer interest expressed in the scheme bodes well for the Autumn programme, which we are currently in the early stages of organising.

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