

Select sires now.

At this stage the breeding season is less than a month away for many dairy farmers so they are going through the process of bull selection for 2016. This is an important task as it determines the genetic potential of the dairy herd in coming years. The first part of the process is to assess where the herd is at currently in terms of genetics. This is mainly done by looking at the EBI report for the herd. The main figures to look at are the milk sub index and the fertility sub index. Ideally the fertility should be double the milk so if the milk sub index is €50 the fertility sub index should be €100.

To drive forward the genetics of the national herd there are a few selection criteria to keep in mind for the coming breeding season. Genomics seem to be the way forward and this technology is around now for a good few years and we know that by and large it works. Some genomic bulls will end up with figures higher than what genomics predict and some bulls will be lower so to protect against this farmers should use at least 7 unrelated bulls each with an equal number of straws.

A + B – C payment systems are being used by the milk purchasers so driving on the milk solids % will increase milk revenue. Farmers with high solids milk still received over 32 cent/litres for milk in 2015. This will be an even more important factor in years of low milk price. This is mainly driven by breeding and selecting bulls with 33kgs of total solids (18 kg fat and 15 kg protein) will ensure that this element will be driven forward. Ideally the protein % should be +0.20% in the bulls proofs.

An important driver of profitability is fertility. Increasing the fertility sub index of EBI will ensure that cows calve more compactly, earlier in the season and therefore have longer lactations leading to increased milk production. Cows will also have more lactations and stay in the herd longer. Ideally farmers should select bulls with €160 fertility sub index.

To breed maiden heifers farmers should select easy calving sires (<1.8% calving difficulty) with a calving survey. The heifers are the usually the best source of genetics on the farm and should be bred to AI dairy bulls. Your Teagasc advisor can help you with your bull selection this spring.