Beef Systems

Dairy Calf-to-Beef Research at Johnstown Castle

Since 2010 a large scale dairy calf-to-beef unit was established at Johnstown Castle to evaluate the performance of dairy calves across varying production systems. The ultimate aim of this research is focused on establishing profitable blueprints of production for producers. Currently, there are two on-going experiments at Johnstown Castle; a male dairy calf-to-beef experiment and an early maturing dairy calf-to-beef trial which includes of heifers and steers.

Male dairy calf-to-beef trial:

Animals are finished as either bulls or steers and slaughtered at varying ages. Avenues are also being explored to refine these blueprints in an effort to reduce the costs of production; increase the utilisation at pasture and increase carcass output per hectare. Alternative finishing strategies are also investigating ways of reducing the concentrate input during the finishing phase.

Early maturing dairy calf-to-beef trial:

Crossing dairy cows with early maturing beef breeds (Aberdeen Angus and Hereford) is most common given the ease of calving and short gestation traits associated with these breed types. For beef producers these early maturing dairy beef crossbred animals offer the potential to achieve a commercially acceptable level of carcass fatness at a young age and are therefore, suitable for grass based systems producing saleable carcasses at relatively low slaughter weight. The current early maturing dairy calf-to-beef trial is investigating the effects of date of birth and slaughter age of both steers and heifers in low input pasture based production systems.