This week we look back at the carcases produced by the BETTER farm group from the date they started officially in the programme on 1 January 2017 up to the end of February this year.

Steers

Eleven of the group killed steers that they bred themselves in 2017. Average carcass weight was 360kg at 24 months of age and average grade was R+. The top five producers are outlined in Table 1 and ranked on weight for age.

Weight for age is important. Firstly, housing is generally the first factor limiting herd growth on a beef farm. In an ideal world, unless there is a lot of grassland and a lot of shed space to use, we should be trying to slaughter some or all of our progeny prior to a second winter. Obviously we are paid on kilos, but it takes inputs to put on those kilos. Younger animals are also more feed efficient so there are more rewards to be had when we put these inputs into a younger beast.

Joe Healy tops the pile, as he did in our weaning weight league table last autumn. To achieve an average carcass weight of 414kg at 23 months is exceptional performance and a testament to the effort he puts in to the breeding of his cattle.

Comparing him with Tom Bolger, he has almost 300 acres of land and is already at the maximum grass stocking rate, which helps him to keep his farm’s grass stocking rate high.

Table 1: BETTER farm beef top five steer producers based on carcass weight for age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Carcase (kg)</th>
<th>Conformation</th>
<th>Age (months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe Healy</td>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>U=</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Hearne</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>U-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Hayes</td>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>U=</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin O’Hare</td>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>U+</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Browne</td>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>U=</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11-farm average: 360 kg

Interestingly, some of the top steer producers are achieving carcase weights before the second winter that can match the top under-16 month bull producers.

For any farmers considering changing to finishing for the first time, it is essential that they educate themselves on market-spec fat scores and carcase weight requirements to ensure they achieve quality assurance bonuses and are paid on the QPS grid.

Adviser comment

Alan Dillon

While many farmers may aspire to change to finishing systems, the first step is to achieve a high daily gain up to weaning off grass and milk, as this will cut the silage and finishing bill at the other end.

Interestingly, some of the top steer producers are achieving carcase weights before the second winter that can match the top under-16 month bull producers.

While more land is required for the steer system, input costs in terms of meal and housing will be lower once the second winter is avoided and I imagine these farms will increase their profitability significantly once systems are up and running.

For any farmers considering changing to finishing for the first time, it is essential that they educate themselves on market-spec fat scores and carcase weight requirements to ensure they achieve quality assurance bonuses and are paid on the QPS grid.

Top: Sean Hayes/Tom Bolger 411kg

Bulls

Average: 386kg

Top: Joe Healy 414kg

Figure 1

Average 386kg