Classy continentals on Shannonside

Philip Keville's penchant for breeding shines through in the quality of his stock, writes Ciarán Lenehan.

One thing becoming very evident as we get to know the 27 new BETTER farmers and their stock is that we have some of the country's foremost cattle breeders on board. Last week, our Tuesday digital BETTER farm offering from Sean Hayes' farm in Co Clare showcased some superb quality animals. However, the Tulla man has competition in Leitrim.

Philip Keville keeps a herd of 16 suckler cows on 16ha at Aughahmore, just outside Carrick-on-Shannon. He farms alongside his father Joe and the two share a passion for good stock and breeding – Philip is a Simmental fan and Joe a long-serving and well-decorated member of the Irish Aberdeen Angus Association. All breeding is by AI.

The farm produces weanlings for sale in the back end through local marts. In recent years, what was an autumn calving spread has unravelled slightly and Philip now has calves dropping from September through to March.

"That's something we're addressing straightaway – the calving has gotten away on us a bit," he told me.

"The plan is to move to 25 cows and we'll get rid of water was a big problem. Philip will continue to sell his heifers as weanlings in future. There is big demand for the type of animal he produces, particularly the Simmentals, and he regularly hits €1,000 with his heifers. He is keen to run his males through a system. By weaning time, a lot of these stock and early calving will suit such a system, his land was traditionally difficult to drain. Philip indeed has excellent calving facilities, his land has traditionally difficult to drain. Philip has done a nice bit of work on his facilities for the inevitable period that newborns will be indoors and an early calving will suit such a system. By weaning time, a lot of these stock and early calving facilities, his land has traditionally difficult to drain.

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Philip Keville's 10-day synchronisation protocol

Philip used a PRID synchronisation protocol on 18 cows to help tighten his calving spread. "I have 18 in total done on the cow if past performance is anything to go by. Philip regularly weans bulls well into the 400kg range. As he is reluctant to cull any cows. For his newborns to be indoors and an early calving will suit such a system. By weaning time, a lot of these stock and early calving will suit such a system.

We're getting better-quality grass, earlier slage and getting cows out to grass sooner in the spring.

Drainage

A calving date like this is not for the faint-hearted. It requires good housing facilities for the inevitable period that newborns will be indoors and an early calving will suit such a system. By weaning time, a lot of these stock and early calving will suit such a system.

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Philip has done a nice bit of work since joining the programme and his local B&T adviser Tom Coll deserves credit. There's no doubt Philip has brilliant stock but tidying up his calving spread is a must as he is also working off farm full-time. The synchronisation programme he's using at the minute is working a treat as he is reluctant to cull any cows.
Dealing with strong grass covers

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Our measuring farms grew 65kg DM/ha daily in the past week, which is back around 10% on last week. Thankfully, after today (Thursday) there looks to be a few days of settled weather in store – things were becoming difficult for some. In the BETTER beef programme but still highly stocked farms, or those actively taking out surpluses, are on track with regard to grassland management – there should be around 12-15 days’ worth of grass on farms this week, which equates to 650-700kg DM/ha based on a stocking rate of 2.5LU/ha.

The BETTER participants who started off at low stocking rates and traditionally set stocked cattle have quickly realised how much grass they can actually produce in a paddock system and while many at low stocking rates are currently working tirelessly to keep the quality in their swards, they now have peace of mind now that they can restock numbers at the soonest available opportunity. Grass utilisation increases by 92%, from 4.3 to 8.2t DM/ha/year, in a paddock versus a set-stocked system.

Heavy, stemmy covers will be a bug bear for many at the moment. Ultimately, the advice is the same as always – skip and make bales that will tick a box for dry cows or as bulky forage in a high-energy finishing diet later on. If they absolutely need to be grazed, it should be with big groups of suckler cows.

Breeding will be winding down on many farms in the near future. When the bulls are pulled, mix cows and calves into big groups and let them work through these heavy covers.

If possible, eat them in short-duration sections and consider running a disc mower or topper across the field around half a day before they’re due a move. This isn’t ideal but will keep the sward fresh next time round. Calves have the chance to creep to better quality grass while the cows are in these covers.

Growth has been back slightly compared to last week with covers of grass present on farm. First cut silage is done and last week I got the opportunity to make hay during the good spell of weather. Stock are thriving very well since turnout. Last week, I weighed the steers and a group of dairy-bred calves which I reared and I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date. The dairy-bred calves were given a worm dose last week as I noticed a few of them starting to show signs of worms. I am very pleased with their performance to date.

After a drop last week, growth has improved and the farm recorded 108kg DM/ha of growth over the past week. Current demand continues to run at 62kg DM/ha. However, this is set to drop next week as more reseeded paddocks start to come back into the rotation. There is 19ha out for reseeding at the moment.

Average farm cover per LU is 168kg DM/ha. The farm is currently stocked at 4.22 LU/ha and there are 11 days’ grazing ahead of stock which is where we want to be. There have been a number of bales taken out for bales in the past three to four weeks and there will be another two paddocks to come out in the next weather window. Three paddocks were also topped that had become stemmy and cows weren’t cleaning out properly.

Cows are currently going into covers of 1,500-1,600kg DM/ha and paddocks are getting 20 units of CAN after each grazing. Forty seven acres of first-cut silage was taken on 17 June.