



Maurice's recipe for success

Ciarán Lenehan spent a day talking breeding and feeding with Waterford's new BETTER farmer Maurice Hearne

Maurice Hearne is one of the few farmers with an autumn-calving herd in the BETTER farm beef programme. He farms 118ha near Dunmore East in Waterford, running 85 sucklers, 21 dairy-beef calves, finishing store bulls, 160 ewes and 30ha of tillage. This year, he calved 85 cows in 12 weeks from early August.

"We had three losses – one set of twins that presented awkwardly, one calf that did not bond with its mother and one deformity. Thankfully, I was able to get foster calves on to all of these mothers from a local dairy farm," Maurice said.

While in the BETTER farm programme, Maurice is grasping the opportunity to drive on his beef enterprise. Forty heifers were bought in and bred this year and poor-performing cows were culled.

"They are Simmentals and Limousins from British Friesian cows and came in at 350kg to 380kg. Average price was €2.10/kg to €2.15/kg. We did six weeks breeding; four to AI and a fortnight with the bull.

"I used Curaheen Earp (SI2152), Castleview Gazelle (ZAG), Brooklands (KJB) and Elderberry Galahad (EBY) and my own Limousin bull is by Sympa (SYP). These would have been spring-born heifers so they won't quite be calving at two, but it meant that they were all above 420kg at breeding. We'll scan them around Christmas."



Maurice Hearne, Tommy Cox (BETTER farm adviser) and Austin Flavin (local B&T adviser) inspect Maurice's finishing bulls (54). They weighed 614kg on 17 November and are due for slaughter next month.

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Autumn 2017-born calves. Maurice's 2016-born calves achieved a daily gain of 1.39kg in the first 200 days.



Fodder beet grown on the farm is included in Maurice's cow and bull finishing diets.



Calves have access to a bedded creep area away from cows and will graze a redstart, rape, stubble turnip field next month.

Maurice sent 44 heifers and 68 cows in total for breeding this autumn, with a view to calving down 100 next year and selling the surplus animals in calf. His cow herd at present is a mixture of continentals – mostly Limousin and Simmental – and Limousin-crosses from the dairy herd.

"I do some AI in the cow herd too, crossing Simmental bulls on any cows with Limousin genetics and vice versa. I also have two Charolais stock bulls and these go in to pick up any cows in heat after AI."

Earlier this year, when we analysed calf and calving performance in the autumn-calving herds, Maurice came out on top. His 2016-born calves achieved an average daily gain of 1.39kg to 200 days and his cows averaged a calving interval of 372 days.

At present, Maurice's cows are indoors with their calves, who have access to a straw-bedded creep area. Maurice's lactating cow diet is as follows:

- ☞ 40kg of 73% DMD grass silage.
- ☞ 1kg of straw.
- ☞ 0.5kg of a 23% crude protein, 0.95 UFL balancer.
- ☞ 5kg of fodder beet.
- ☞ 1.25kg of crimped barley.
- ☞ 0.1kg minerals.
- ☞ Dietary nutrients supplied: 9.93 UFL, 959g PDI (net protein).

The diet is fed as a TMR. The only components not produced on farm are the balancer and minerals.

Before the onset of calving, Maurice's cows would have been running on bare paddocks during the day and brought indoors at night for silage in order to manage condition.

Winter calf grazing

Maurice has sown four acres of a rape, redstart, stubble turnip mixture beside the yard for his suckler calves.

"I'll send them to this each morning from the end of December and they'll get back to the cows for a suck in the evening. Obviously if the weather sours they'll stay indoors.

"This is my first year trying this out. To be honest, it's part of a strategy to reduce pneumonia in my calves – I've had a problem with it in recent years. We've started vaccinating at a couple of weeks of age and have made some structural adaptations to our sheds too."

- ☞ At the moment, the calves are eating 1.25kg of supplement. This will be pulled back gradually and completely removed in the spring when these animals get to grass. It is offered with good-quality grass silage and is high in molasses to encourage intake. The formulation is as follows:
- ☞ 50% barley.
- ☞ 20% rolled oats.

- ☞ 20% soya bean meal.
- ☞ 7% molasses.
- ☞ 3% minerals.
- ☞ Specifications: 16% crude protein, 0.94 UFL, 41% starch/sugar.

Progeny are brought through to beef on Maurice's farm, with males killed as bulls. To drive output, 15 additional bulls were purchased for finishing alongside his own this year.

On 17 November, there were 54 bulls in Maurice's finishing group, weighing 614kg at an average age of 14.2 months. This translates into a weight gain from birth of 1.34kg – continuing on from these calves' excellent performance on the cow.

Maurice's bull finishing diet is as follows:

- ☞ 11kg of a rolled barley (70%) balancer (30% - 23% crude protein, 0.95 UFL) mixture.
- ☞ 10kg of fodder beet.
- ☞ 1kg of straw.
- ☞ Ad-lib grass silage (68% DMD - ~10kg intake).
- ☞ 0.1kg minerals.
- ☞ Specifications (dry matter): 14% crude protein, 1.03 UFL, 42% starch/sugar, 29% NDF (fibre).
- ☞ Nutrients supplied: 13.19 UFL, 1240g PDI (net protein).

Maurice plans to take in more bulls when the current group are slaughtered in the coming weeks.

Fixed costs:

- <€350/ha
- <€550/ha
- >€550/ha

€/hr worked:

- (as prop of net profit)
- >€12.50/hr
- <€12.50/hr
- <€5/hr

Cashflow:

- (consecutive months without sales - inc. sheep)
- <5
- <7
- >7

Fixed costs	●
€/hr labour	●
Cashflow	●
Calving pattern	Autumn
Farm system	Suckler to beef
Farm size (beef)	60.1ha
2016 gross margin	€859/ha
Land type	Variable