



A detailed look at Harry's herd

Ciarán Lenehan caught up with Laois BETTER farmer Harry Lalor this week

Twenty-six-year-old Harry Lalor obtained his degree in agricultural science from UCD in 2013 and now farms full-time along with his father Joe in Ballacolla, Co Laois. They run 141ha in total, though this includes cereal ground, paddocks dedicated to the pair's 300-ewe mid-season lambing flock, land used for growing fodder beet and paddocks for horses. In terms of the beef enterprise, just under 80ha is solely dedicated to the substantial beef enterprise.

The Lalors keep 115 spring-calving cows and run a dairy calf-to-beef system. There is a substantial cocktail of breeds in the cow herd, with everything from a 480kg first-cross Limousin to an 880kg Charolais-Simmental cross.

"Going forward I want a Saler-based cow that I can cross with a terminal Charolais bull. We have a Saler bull at the moment and some purebred Saler cows - I'm trying to take as many daughters from these as I can," Harry told me.

The current breeding herd has an average replacement index of €98 (five stars), milk index figure of +5.9kg (five-stars) and calving interval (fertility) index figure of -1.38 days (four stars). Six of Harry's cows are in the top 1% nationally for replacement index value. Average carcass weight index value (weight for age) is quite low at 11kg (two stars) but as Harry stated he can compensate for this with terminal sires, like his Charolais stock bull.

Carcass weight

He is by Major and has five stars for carcass weight (38kg) and conformation. His Saler bull is by Vanlooy, has a massive replacement index value of €154 and is strong for milk and fertility. There is one other bull on the farm, a four-star Limousin with decent milk and strong terminal traits.

This year's calf crop are doing well, with heifers gaining 1.06kg daily since birth and bulls 1.10kg daily.

Despite market signals, Harry goes against the grain and finishes his male progeny as bulls off the grid (over 16 months of age).

They go to grass as yearlings until early August, when they come indoors

for finishing before slaughter at 18-20 months of age.

"They have their own section of the farm, away from other stock. While it mightn't seem the norm to graze bulls, you get lots of cheap weight gain. Since 3 May, the bulls have achieved 1.3kg of daily weight gain at grass. From a management point of view you just have to keep the grass under them - don't push them right down to 4cm, particularly when the weather's unsettled. If it gets really wet I have a couple of areas where they can stand off to save the ground. There's no point in denying it - if there's a wet field and they get unsettled it's not long before they do damage," Harry said.

Cheap weight gain

Though Harry's bulls will be sold on a flat price and not command any conformation or quality assurance bonuses, the cheap weight gain he achieves at grass makes this system work. He also communicates with his processors annually. Demand for carcasses like these is limited and very specific - processors have less options when selling than with prime beef. Typically, a larger proportion of these carcasses will be sold for manufacturing beef.

His bulls weighed 502kg at the end of July and will come in for finishing in the coming days. Harry has recently installed rubber slat mats in his finishing shed. These came in at a cost of €1,633 (ex-VAT) per pen (21x15ft), though just two-thirds of the pens were covered - the idea being that the animals will eat on the concrete and lie back on the mats.

Harry and Joe have a diet feeder on the farm and will feed a TMR based on 10kg of concentrates, 1kg of rape straw, all the grass silage they can eat (adjusted based on bale dry matter) and 14kg of home-grown fodder beet, which will be introduced towards the end of finishing.

Ideally, these animals would be closer to 525kg at housing, but a post-weaning pneumonia outbreak last winter led to a temporary stall in thrive. While no animals were lost, there is no doubt that the reduction in thrive and required medicines were a big, unnecessary drain on farm finances.

This year, Harry and Joe will place a bigger emphasis on gradual, stress-free weaning and have installed stock board in the weaning's shed to eliminate any drafts.



Harry Lalor's spring-born calves have achieved 1.08kg of weight gain daily since birth.



Rubber slat mats fitted this year to finishing shed at a cost of €1,633 per pen.

Fixed costs ●
€/hr labour ●
Cashflow ●

Calving pattern	Spring
Farm system	Suckler to steer and heifer beef
Farm size	79ha
2016 gross margin	€267/ha
Land type	90% dry, 10% heavy

Table 1: Harry Lalor cow herd replacement index breakdown

Replacement index	Carcass weight	Daughter milk	Daughter calving interval
€98	+11kg	+5.9kg	-1.38 days
*****	**	*****	****



Adviser comment John Greaney

Given the size of Harry and Joe's holding it'll be a real challenge to push the stocking rate to the limits. Finishing the bulls at 20 months might not suit every farm, but it definitely has its advantages here, increasing the stocking rate at grass. Housing would be an issue if they opted for the steer route and although

the average bulls are finished off the grid they're gone before Christmas and after the burst of grass cattle. Harry and Joe have their hands full with 300 ewes while also calving 115 cows but they're managing well. It'll be interesting to see how the farm does but they've both really bought into the programme so far and if the herd health problems improve slightly, this farm in Laois will be at the top of the ladder.

*Guide to traffic lights

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



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Go tight again as ground dries out

CIARÁN LENEHAN & DANIEL MCPARTLIN

Grass growth rates increased slightly this week, with our measuring farms recording a nationwide average of 63kg DM/ha/day for the past seven days. As always, there is massive noise around this figure, based on regional weather and individual farm grassland management. Use the map for a guide to growth rates near you.

Thankfully, ground conditions will have improved across most of the country. While

showers in the west remain persistent, we are not seeing the volumes of rain that fell last week. Though the ongoing moisture there might still be acting as a grazing hand-brake, things are forecast to improve after some light rain on Friday morning and the weekend should be dry.

As ground does dry out, it's important that we get in to clean out fields well while we can. Anything we leave behind now will still be there the next time we hit these paddocks. Only then, its feed value will have plummeted, it will have grown fibrous and unpalatable and there's a chance that

* In short

- ➔ Grass growth 63kg DM/ha/day.
- ➔ Forecast for dry weekend in the west.
- ➔ Eat down paddocks skipped during wet weather.
- ➔ Take any silage as soon as possible to get after-grass back in.
- ➔ Aim for 16-18 days of grass ahead.

the weather will be much worse than it is now.

Clean paddocks out to 4cm

now so that when we come back to these fields again, cattle will be looking at leaf right down to the clay. If you moved animals on early or skipped wet areas last week, go back and clean these fields out as soon as the ground allows. Do so with experienced grazers like cows – young stock will be slow to eat this material down.

Any remaining second-cut silage or paddocks earmarked as surplus should be removed ASAP. We need to get this after-grass back into the system and working for us while growth rates are good and ground conditions allow.



Source: PastureBase Ireland, Agrinet and Irish Farmers Journal.



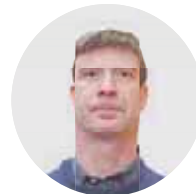
Philip Keville
Co Leitrim

System	suckler to weaning
Soil type	mostly heavy
Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	436
Grass demand (kg DM/ha/day)	20
Growth (kg DM/ha/day)	12

Growth is definitely back with the recent wet weather but I still have plenty of grass ahead of me at the minute. I'm going with a bag of 18-6-12/acre after each grazing and I've all the slurry out on the second-cut ground. It's been a great year for grass to date so hopefully ground conditions will hold up.

I'm beginning to wean the strongest of my calves that calved in late December/early January and they're well over the 400kg mark. My heifers in particular did a great thrive this season. I hope to finish the bulls under 16 months and sell the heifers in the back end. They've got some good Simmental breeding behind them with the stars to back it up, so hopefully they should do well.

I'm going with 1t lime/acre in September and all my paddocks have been set up since joining the BETTER Farm programme. If I carry out the last of the shoring on a block of ground next year, I should be in a good position to drive up my stocking rate.



Gareth McCormack
Co Cavan

System	suckler to weaning
Soil type	mostly heavy
Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	846
Grass demand (kg DM/ha/day)	16
Growth (kg DM/ha/day)	54

Grass is in very plentiful supply on the farm. Cows with the bull calves at foot are currently grazing after-grass from the 24 acres of silage I harvested on 16 July. I hope to move cows with the heifer calves at foot into this after-grass also in the next couple of days.

There were six bales/acre on the crop so I was happy enough. I just got it baled before the weather broke and it was just starting to head out so I was very lucky. All 44 cows and heifers were scanned last week, with 42 of these in-calf. Stock bulls were let out to mop up after six weeks of AI. The two Charolais bulls were only responsible for bulling 10 cows so I was delighted that 32 cows held to the AI.

I'm currently ploughing 10 acres of grassland. This was sprayed off four weeks ago and then shore drained with 3in pipe and 2in of drainage stone. I would have liked to have started ploughing before this but the bad weather hampered my plans.



Ger O'Dwyer
Tullamore Farm

System	suckler/calf to beef
Soil type	variable
Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	775
Grass demand (kg DM/ha/day)	49
Growth (kg DM/ha/day)	53

Grass growth dropped a little over the past week. Recorded growth was 53kg/DM/ha, which is just above our demand figure of 49kg/DM/ha. We are trying to build covers and are going into some heavier covers. There are 16 days of grass ahead on the farm, which is on target. Average farm cover is 775kg DM/ha and the farm is currently stocked at 3.46 LU/ha. The farm needs to have 25 days ahead at the end of August. A bag of CAN has been spread over some recently grazed paddocks this week to try and build more grass. No more paddocks will be taken out for silage.

All calves were dosed with a white oral drench two weeks ago. Some coughing was noticed in calves at weighing on 20 July and the decision was taken to dose. Calves are being encouraged to creep graze and weaning of first calved heifers will start in mid-September. Male calves weighed 216kg on 20 July and gained 1.3kg/day since birth and heifer calves weighed 200kg and gained 1.2kg/day since birth.



Dwayne Stanley
Co Tipperary

System	suckler to steer/calf to beef
Soil type	variable
Average farm cover (kg DM/ha)	1,155
Grass demand (kg DM/ha/day)	33
Growth (kg DM/ha/day)	68

We're just getting occasional showers, so it's not affecting ground condition. We have held off spreading fertiliser this past few weeks because we have a lot of surplus grass, with 260 bales taken out since the start of the grazing season. Before this, we were spreading one bag/acre of 18-6-12 to improve the P+K in the soil. I intend to go out with another round of fertiliser on 8 September to build covers for the autumn. I'm currently running a leader/follower system with my spring-born dairy cross calves in front and my autumn 2015 heifers and steers coming behind.

The calves are currently being moved every two days with the heifers and steers coming behind to graze. I hope to have the heifers and steers gone to the factory at 24 months which hopefully should be before winter housing. The first of my autumn-calving cows calved on 2 August, with the last cow due to calve on 10 October. We intend to spray off 19 acres for reseeding in the next week.

10-year average grass growth

kg DM/ha/day

