**Smash and grab in the Kingdom**

The Flahertys in Kerry have just weighed their 2017 calves after some weeks of unsettled weather.

James Flaherty and his father John are farming just shy of 41ha in Cordal, near Castleisland in Co Kerry. The farm is split in two blocks, with 27ha of rented ground located around one mile from the main yard. In 2017, the 46-cow herd calved from late-January until the first week of May. John milked cows on the home block until 2003 and since then the farm has carried beef cattle and more recently sucklers. He was one of the first farmers to introduce wiggle and pigtails. I think our average daily gain is very small, and it is a low proportion of their diet.

The herd

The Flahertys are passionate cattle breeders with a particular penchant for the Parthenaise breed. "You have nice handy cows, easy calving, good growthy calves and shape and that'll generate interest in the mart ring," James said.

Traditional weanling-sellers, the Flahertys are rethinking their production system for the years ahead. "Prices were too inconsistent for me and with the e-forts we're putting in to breeding and driving the farm, I think there is scope to add more value. I'd like to move away from weanling production and towards beef production. We'll sit down in the coming weeks to look at our 2017 batch of calves and see what we can do," James concluded.

James took a weight on his suckler herd on 8 August. All of our BEFFER farmers will take both weaning weights and what we call a mid-season weight, like this one. The calves (46) are growing at a rate of 1.04kg daily, with males (22) doing 1.11kg and females (24) at 0.98kg. However, with a push on to build up the herd quickly, they went out the very next morning with the sun on their backs.

Calves by heifers are achieving daily weight gains of 0.87kg. Calves from the mature herd (33) are growing at 1.11kg daily (bulls 1.17kg, heifers 1.04kg). Their average DOB is 21 March and they weighed 198kg. Table 1 takes the top and bottom calves from a growth point of view from both the mature and first-calver groups.

Genetic propensity for milk is currently driving calf performance in the older cows. Amazingly, there is a gap of 75kg already opened up between a pair of calves born one day apart, with the heavier calf suckling a first-cross cow and the lighter animal on a continental cow who is 180kg heavier.

What will be interesting now is whether or not these growth rates continue right up to weaning, as calves now begin to mature as grazers and milk constitutes a lower proportion of their diet.

**Adviser comment Alan Dillon**

The Flaherty farm is well placed to capitalise on growing more grass as soil fertility is addressed. The farm is well set up with roadways and paddocks. Housing will need to be altered, with cubicles removed and extra feed barriers installed to allow for the housing of more stock without major investment.

**Cow type will need to be looked at:** milk is deficient in some of the herd, especially those with a high level of continental breeding. A dairy-cross cow will be the ideal foundation for replacements — breeding these with maternal beef sires. A number of dairy-bred HE and AA bull calves will be reared in the short-term to improve output. This may or may not continue once the suckler to finishing system is fully running.

**Table 1:** Top- and bottom-performing spring-born calves on Flaherty farm (out of mature cows or heifers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dam type</th>
<th>Tag no.</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Sire breed</th>
<th>ADG</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Dam mat. index</th>
<th>Dam breed</th>
<th>Lact.</th>
<th>Dam milk ind.</th>
<th>Dam weight</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>06-Mar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Parthenaise</td>
<td>1.32kg</td>
<td>250kg</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>AA x FR</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.9kg</td>
<td>620kg</td>
<td>Produces heavy calf every year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>07-Mar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Parthenaise</td>
<td>0.84kg</td>
<td>175kg</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>CH x SI</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>800kg</td>
<td>Culling this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>19-Feb</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Parthenaise</td>
<td>1.23kg</td>
<td>250kg</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>HE x FR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.68kg</td>
<td>605kg</td>
<td>Dam was originally bought-in foster calf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>20-Mar</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>0.6kg</td>
<td>125kg</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>PT x HE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.4kg</td>
<td>530kg</td>
<td>One of a set of twins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**This picture was taken 10 days after cattle were housed from this paddock due to inclement weather.**

**Calf (DOB 11/04/17) achieving 1.17kg of daily gain.**

**Red calf (DOB 09/02/17) is by AI bull B2B and gaining 1.25kg daily.**

**Cattle are grazed in strips during wet weather, sometimes moving three times daily.**

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**Table of pictures at farmersjournal.ie**

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**Top Mature**

**Bottom 512 07-Mar M Parthenaise 0.84kg 175kg ** CH x SI 5 -2.8 800kg Culling this year

**Bottom 522 20-Mar F Angus 0.6kg 125kg **** PT x HE 1 4.4kg 530kg One of a set of twins

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**Guide to traffic lights**

- Fixed costs: €350/ha - €355/ha > €550/ha
- €/hr worked: (as prop of net profit) < €12.50/hr €12.50/ hr €25/ hr

**Cashflow:** (consecutive months without sales – inc. sheep)

- < €5/hr
- €5 - €7
- €7 - €9
Building toward a mid-September peak

Ciarán Lenahean
BEEF SPECIALIST
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As expected, wet weather and the noticeable drop in temperature in recent days has led to a growth rate reduction of 10% to 12% compared with last week. Growth is now running at an average of 56kg DM/ha/day nationally. As always, there is a lot of variation around this number, with our highest having another 60kg DM/ha recorded in Tipperary and the lowest of 26kg DM/ha taken in Roscommon.

However, these figures will have been affected by management on individual farms and do not necessarily represent prevailing rates for the area.

Now our focus should be on building grass. This means getting any remaining silage cuts done as quickly as possible and parking up the mower for the year, going into slightly heavier covers than normal, getting fertiliser out and considering selling or housing some animals for finishing. Only consider reseeding this by having an autumn bulk of my stock. I will do winter to 3.5 months for the young stock if covers are too high due to heavy rain and cooler temperatures are making utilisation difficult, keep cattle moving. Some of our BETTER farmers are working in 12-hour allocations to make the best of the wet conditions.

Tetany
As calves get strong and grass dry matter reduces, we are also moving into prime tetany conditions.

If grass is very leafy and the forecast is bad, consider moving cattle on early, ideally to paddocks with relatively strong grass and shelter. Bales of straw, hay or stemmy silage will also help. Obviously there should be magnesium sources in fields such as buckets or water-borne minerals.

Shane Gleeson
Co Limerick

I plan to shorten my winter to 3.5 months for the bulk of my stock. I will do this by having an autumn rotation planner in place and closing 60% of my land by early November to have enough grass for the spring.

The weather has been unsettled here in the west over the past few weeks and while ground isn’t cutting up just yet it wouldn’t take much rain for poaching to occur. My demand has reduced to almost nothing on the home block as more silage ground away from the house has come back into the rotation. The cows and calves are away on this and it’ll give me a much needed chance to build grass for the autumn. I went with a half bag of urea/accred a week or two ago and whilst growth hasn’t thickened, everywhere is greening up nicely. I plan on going with a bag of Super P/accred on the main block as the P index is low.

I slaughtered the 2016 bull calves recently and I was pleased with how they got on. On average, they killed out at 360kg and all had adequate covers of flesh. It was my first time going down the bull route and I’ll have it down to a fine art for next year.

Nigel O’Kane
Co Galway

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John Heslin
Derrypatrick Herd

Following a growth of 80kg DM/ha the week beginning 31st July, the past week’s rain and cooler temperatures have moved as surplus last week to maintain quality grass for grazing. The whole farm is now available for grazing resulting in a moderate herd demand of 41kg DM/ha. Our focus immediately changes to building our grass supply and increasing rotation length. The challenge now is to maximise grass consumed while grazing heavier covers and limit/prevent ground damage as grazing conditions begin to deteriorate.

Steers and heifers were weighed last week at 17 months and are on average, 595kg and 515kg respectively. Average daily gain since turnout in mid-March is 1.2kg/day for steers and 0.9kg/day for heifers. Heifers should meet the criteria for a 20 month slaughter while the steers may be slightly older. We aim to have both groups slaughtered prior to their second winter. Supplementation has not commenced and will depend on grass quality/supply and weather conditions.

Martin Downes
Co Westmeath

Grass growth has picked up in recent weeks and as a result grass is relatively good supply on the farm at present. All of the second-cut silage was completed in the last few weeks and I also took out a few paddocks that were getting strong. The silage ground will be welcome back into the grazing platform as I start to build covers toward the back end of the year. To further build covers, the entire farm got around 20 units of nitrogen last week. The stock bulls were taken out last week and I hope to scan shortly to see how the breeding season went.

I started to feed a few of the cows that I have identified for culling as I hope to slaughter them before housing. With the weather conditions deteriorating over the last few weeks, I decided to house all spring-born bulls for finishing.

They are currently on good-quality silage and 4kg of ration and they will be built up to ad-lib over the coming weeks.