

The ICBF GENE IRELAND® Dairy Beef Programme

The Teagasc/ABP dairy beef programme is directly linked with the ICBF Gene Ireland dairy beef programme. Dairy farmers involved with the Gene Ireland Dairy Programme have the option, if interested, of using straws from beef bulls suitable for use in dairy cows.

What are the Objectives of the GENE IRELAND® Dairy Programme?

The objective of the Gene Ireland Dairy programme is to test 60-70 bulls each year and that each bull would have 100 heifer replacements recorded in 100 herds by year 4 of the programme.

Gene Ireland Dairy is focused on three key areas:

1. The selection of high EBI young bulls.
2. Progeny testing the young bulls on a “Targeted” set of herds.
3. Elite bulls are returned to AI.

More information can be found on https://www.icbf.com/wp/?page_id=179

Where is the GENE IRELAND® Dairy Beef Programme?

The Dairy Beef Gene Ireland programme was set up in 2015, in conjunction with Teagasc and Anglo Beef Processors (ABP). As part of the programme, unproven, short gestation and easy calving sires (i.e. sires that are typically chosen for use on dairy cows) with high genetic merit for important terminal traits (determined using the Terminal index) are identified by ICBF, AI companies (NCBC, Eurogene AI) and breed societies for use in the programme.

Participating dairy farmers purchase the semen at a reduced rate. The test straws are sent out to the dairy farmers in packs of 35 straws (5 bulls x 7 straws). The allocation of bulls per pack is chosen at random; herd-owners do not get a choice of individual test bulls. There is no particular requirement on how these straws are used (i.e. at what point they are used during the breeding season), this is up to the discretion of the herd-owner. In return, the farmers record traits such as calving difficulty, gestation length, calf quality and defects.

The ultimate aim is to identify bulls with the highest performance for carcass weight, conformation and feed intake for beef production, with high meat quality for the consumer without comprising calving difficulty or gestation length for the dairy cow. These high performing bulls can then be used to improve the genetic merit of the pedigree beef herds which, in turn, will produce the next generation of beef bulls for the dairy herd.

The programme has grown rapidly from its inception. In 2015, 650 dairy farmers involved with the Gene Ireland Dairy Programme had the option of using beef straws from the Dairy Beef programme, however only 108 of these farmers became involved. Since then, the number of dairy herds involved doubled, semen sales have increased by 4,550 doses and the number of bulls involved has grown from 12 to 19. In addition the number of breeds involved expanded from three in 2015 to six in 2017.

2015 Programme	2016 Programme	2017 Programme
2,750 straws	5,666 straws	7,300 straws
12 bulls – Angus, Hereford and Limousin	14 bulls – Angus, Hereford, Limousin and Shorthorn	19 bulls – Angus, Hereford, Limousin, Shorthorn, Saler and Belgian Blue
108 herds involved	166 herds involved	208 herds involved
1,400 inseminations	3,760 inseminations	3440 (to date)

Of the calves born from the ICBF Gene Ireland programme, 600 calves from selected sires are bought back by Teagasc/ABP at two to three weeks of age for the Teagasc/ABP Dairy Beef Programme. Once reared to 15 weeks of age on ABP Blade Rearer farms, 250 are sent to Johnstown castle and 350 to the ABP Trial Farm. The rest of the calves are reared commercially.

To receive more information on Dairy/Beef Programme please contact Niall Kilrane on 045 521 573.