

BETTERfarm Beef Programme

BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY through TRAINING EXTENSION RESEARCH

Breeding season under way on BETTER farms



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The breeding season is now under way for spring calving herds in the BETTER Farm programme. Last year, breeding was slow to get under way as fodder supplies were running low and

cows were being offered low quality forage, delaying cows coming back into heat.

This year, most of the farms have managed to get late February and March calving cows back to grass shortly after they calved.

Moving cows onto fresh grass increased the amount of dry matter energy in the animals' diet and this has had a positive effect on cow fertility.

Cows are coming back into heat from 30 to 40 days after calving, especially where cows calved down in ideal body condition and experienced little difficulty.

First calved heifers require greater attention than cows once calved.

They have also been very quick to come back into heat again and are displaying strong signs of heat activity.

On the farms that are using AI, this has helped to make heat detection easier. With cows that are being bred to AI, there should be minimal stress when

handling. The programme farmers are keeping these cows close to the yard to ease herding daily. Where cows are on outfarms, there are good handling facilities present to help bring cows in for breeding with minimal stress on animals.

The breeding period will be kept to a period of 10 to 12 weeks, depending on the farmer's individual prefer-

ence and how tight the calving period currently is.

A tight breeding season results in a tight calving season, which can put pressure on housing facilities, but, overall, the programme farmers have found it to be a huge benefit in herd management.

Calving patterns slipped on some farms this spring as a direct result of last year.

But with improved grazing conditions this spring, the programme farms should be able to tighten up later calving cows again.

Good grazing conditions had a positive effect on the breeding season last autumn with farms having 90% to 95% of cows settled in-calf inside 10 weeks. All being well, this spring should be no different.

Table 1: Converting growth rate into kilos of liveweight per hectare/acre

	Daily growth rate kg/DM/HA						
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Kg/LW/HA	700-1,000	1,000-1,500	1,400-2,000	1,750-2,500	2,100-3,000	2,450-3,500	2,800-4,000
Kg/LW/Ac	280-400	420-600	560-800	700-1,000	850-1,200	1,000-1,400	1,100-1,600

*During period of poor utilisation, use figures at the lower end of the range.

ON THE GROUND DISCUSSION GROUP

Bull beef systems a key topic at meeting

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Last week the BETTER Farm participants in the south east and south west regions of the country held a combined discussion group meeting.

Two suckler to beef farms were visited, those of David Kinsella and BETTER Farm participant Patrick Grennan.

Both farmers are outside New Ross, Co Wexford, and are focussed on top-class grassland management.

They have been active members in the Model County Discussion Group and in a smaller grassland group facilitated by local Teagasc adviser, Michael Fitzgerald.

Programme adviser Peter Lawrence kept the focus of the talk to grassland management and producing cattle to market requirements.

Patrick Grennan
- Dunganstown,
New Ross,
Wexford



David Kinsella -
Newbawn, New
Ross, Wexford

Farm details

David Kinsella farms 44ha (108 acres) of grassland and operates a 70-cow spring-calving herd. Calving runs from February to early April with a calving interval of 369 days. Cows are mainly Charolais cross Simmental.

Heifers are retained from within the herd and are served to easy-calving Limousin sires through AI. Heif-

ers calve at 24 months of age with little trouble. Cows are traditionally bred to AI and to a Charolais stock bull.

The farm system was traditionally an 18-month bull finishing system. Typical carcass weight averaged 450kg. However, this year has seen a change in farm direction.

The strongest male calves born in 2013 were castrated last September after weaning. They are now being taken through to finish as steers. The remaining bull calves were left entire and housed to finish under 16 months of age this June.

Patrick Grennan farms 32.8ha (80 acres), of which 30.8ha (75 acres) is grassland with the remainder in spring barley. The farm is extremely fragmented, which makes grazing management complicated as moving stock between land blocks often requires additional help. The farm carries 35



The BETTER farm group members discuss grass growth and grassland management on David Kinsella's farm.

spring-calving Limousin cows which are served with a Limousin stock bull. Heifers are normally retained from within the herd, but last year some additional replacements were purchased. Heif-

ers are served with Angus sires through AI and calve at 24 months.

Male calves are taken through to finish under 16 months of age and carcass weights typically average

around 420kg. Heifers that are not suitable for breeding are either finished at 22 months or sold as stores, depending on grass and silage availability.

Bull beef

From the profit monitor figures in 2013, the farms in bull beef production generally had higher output and gross margins than weanling, or store producers. The current changes to the market specification generated plenty of debate.

Both farms visited had perfected their system in getting bulls finished. But tighter enforcement of carcass weight limits has created problems in getting young bulls with a high growth potential to the



Bull beef production was also discussed on Patrick Grennan's farm.