

# 18 - 20 MONTH SUCKLER BULL BEEF

## 1. SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

- Production of bulls from the suckler herd which are slaughtered between 18 and 20 months of age.
- The system allows for a period at grass in the second grazing season before an intensive finishing period.
- Bulls on this system are not eligible for the Quality Payment Scheme (QPS).
- Producers need to discuss with their processor that they intend to produce 18 to 20 month bulls as market options may be limited with bulls over 16 months and there is the potential of heavy carcasses.

## 2. TYPICAL LIVEWEIGHTS AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF PRODUCTION

STAGE OF PRODUCTION	LIVEWEIGHT (KG)	AVERAGE DAILY GAIN (KG/DAY)
Weaning (Start Weight)	320	1.33
Turnout	400	0.60
Housing (mid-summer)	535	1.35
Slaughter Weight	700	1.65
Carcase Weight (kg)	390-420	

## 3. MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

- Calves selected for this system should have performed well pre weaning achieving 1.25kg/day or better from birth.
- Animals will need to achieve a lifetime gain of around 1.20kg/day from birth to slaughter.
- On suckler farms finishing their own bulls the system is best suited where the herd is achieving a compact calving over a 10-12 week period.
- As weanlings, the bulls are over wintered on 1-2kg concentrate plus good quality silage (72%DMD) for their 1st winter with a targeted gain of 0.6kg/day.
- Yearling bulls are turned out in early spring and grazed for 100 days with a targeted gain of 1.35kg/day while at grass.
- Bulls are rehoused and fed on *ad-lib* concentrates for 80-100 days gaining 1.65kg/day achieving a finishing weight of 700kg.
- A good herd health programme is required for this intensive system.
- As animals will be rehoused during the summer months in this system good housing facilities will be required with adequate lying space, clean drinking water and good ventilation.

## 4. INPUTS REQUIRED

Concentrates	1.3t DM or 1.5t fresh weight
Grazed Grass	1.0t DM
Silage	1.1t DM or 5.5t fresh weight
Stocking Rate	4.9 animals/ha at 170kg organic N per ha

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## 5. ECONOMICS

		€
a. Weaned Calf Purchase Value	320 kg	
b. Carcase Value	400 kg	
c. Sales – Purchases (B – A)		
Variable Costs per Head*		
Grass	1.0 tDM	€40
Concentrates	1.5 tonnes	
Silage	5.5 tonnes	€165
Veterinary	-	€35
Transport & Levies	-	€40
d. Total Variable Costs		
Gross Margin per Head (C – D) **		

\* Variable costs per head do not include interest or mortality costs.

\*\* Subtract estimated fixed costs per head to calculate net margin per head.

## 6. MARKET CONSIDERATIONS

- As outlined, producers undertaking this system should do so in consultation with a meat plant, and with a clear understanding of the desired carcase specifications.
- Young bulls should achieve a minimum fat class of “2+”. If a carcase is not sufficiently finished, the beef cuts look less appealing and eating quality is reduced. Poorly fleshed young bulls are more likely to produce dark-cutting beef.
- Strongest demand is for animals of up to approximately 400 kg carcase weight, which will produce steak cuts of the preferred size for most customers.
- Care should be taken in loading and transporting young bulls. To prevent stress, animals should be kept in their peer groups and slaughtered without delay.

## 7. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Turning yearling bulls out to grass for a second grazing system requires secure fencing and good management. Bulls may not perform as well at grass in spring if the weather remains unsettled.
- Bulls will be rehoused in mid- summer, so feed needs to be kept fresh and sheds need to be kept cool to maintain intakes.
- Animals in this system can easily exceed optimal carcase weights of 400-420kg. So close monitoring of finishing weights is advised.
- This system will leave animals ready for slaughter in the autumn period where traditionally slaughter numbers increase. This may reduce the finishing price available.
- All producers are advised to discuss their intention to finish older bulls in advance with their processor as marketing of these animals may be difficult.
- Even though animals are grazed in their 2nd season this is still a high input system.
- Bulls can be aggressive and pose a health and safety risk when handling indoors and at grass.