

20 MONTH HEIFER BEEF

(SUCKLER BRED)

1. SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

- On this system continental heifers are slaughtered at 20 months of age before the second winter.
- Heifers can be housed for a 6-8 week period in the autumn prior to slaughter or if there is sufficient grass available they can be supplemented at grass.
- Heifers on this system are eligible for the Quality Payment Scheme (QPS) provided they are quality assured and meet the conformation and fat class requirements.

2. TYPICAL LIVEWEIGHTS AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF PRODUCTION

STAGE OF PRODUCTION	LIVEWEIGHT (KG)	AVERAGE DAILY GAIN (KG/DAY)
Weaning (Start Weight)	290	1.20
Turnout	370	0.60
Housing (2nd winter)	510	0.90
Slaughter Weight	565	0.95
Carcase Weight (kg)	290-320	

3. MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

- Heifers selected for this system will have performed well pre weaning achieving 1.20kg/day from birth.
- Animals will need to achieve a lifetime gain of around 0.85kg/day from birth to slaughter.
- On suckler farms finishing their own heifers the system is best suited where the herd is achieving a compact calving over a 10-12 week period.
- Heifers are given 1.0 -1.5kg of concentrates and good quality silage over their first winter to achieve a weight gain of 0.5-0.6kg/day.
- The system also requires high DMD silage of 72%DMD or better for the indoor feeding period.
- Heifers are turned out at 370kg in the spring and grazed for just over 5 months achieving 140kg of liveweight gain. This requires good grassland management.
- Heifers can be housed in mid-September and fed on silage and concentrates or they may remain at grass and fed concentrates at grass until slaughter.

4. INPUTS REQUIRED

Concentrates	0.5t DM or 0.58t fresh weight
Grazed Grass	1.5t DM
Silage	0.9t DM or 4.5 t fresh weight
Stocking Rate	3.9 animals/ha at 170kg organic N per ha

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5. ECONOMICS

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a. Weaned Calf Purchase Value	320 kg	
b. Carcase Value	310 kg	
c. Sales – Purchases (B – A)		
Variable Costs per Head*		
Grass	1.5 tDM	€60
Concentrates	0.58 tonnes	
Silage	4.5 tonnes	€135
Veterinary	-	€25
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

- Finished heifers usually attract the highest QPS base-price at slaughter because they tend to meet the desired specifications for most customers, in terms of age, carcase weight, conformation etc.
- In addition to the export meat plants, the Irish butcher / wholesale trade often represents a strong market for heifers.
- When finishing heifers, producers should keep a keen eye on fat cover. The ideal carcass fat class for most customers is from a “3” to a “4-”.
- Excess fat makes the beef less visually appealing and results in a loss in meat yield and higher labour costs on account of trimming.

7. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Heifers on this system are highly desirable as they will be slaughtered at a young age, good carcase weight and are typically R and U grade.
- It is important that heifers on this regime achieve the targeted weight gain of 80kg over the first winter.
- Good grassland management and early turnout in spring is critical to achieving good weight gain at grass.
- This system allows extra cows to be carried in a suckler system because of the earlier age of slaughter of the heifers.
- Heifers are potentially being marketed in the autumn when supplies of finished cattle are at their highest which may impact on the finished cattle price.