

Genetics and breeds

Maternal Herd

Genetics has been shown to play an important role in the overall profitability on farms through aiding in the breeding decisions that has the potential to increase long-term performance of animals. The ideal suckler cow for Ireland is a cow that will efficiently supply a weanling that has a good weight for age from a grazed grass diet and continue to go back in calf year on year. Therefore the key drivers to profitability include: stocking rate, mean calving date, age at first calving, number of calves per cow per year, calf growth rate at grass and days to slaughter. However, all these drivers are irrelevant if the appropriate cow suited to a grass based system of production has not been established. National industry figures suggests there is an enormous gap between best practice and national standards in relation to age at first calving, calves weaned/cow and cow survival. Since genetic gain is cumulative and permanent an animal with high genetic merit for maternal traits should be reflected in greater milk and fertility potential of that animal and subsequent descendants. In autumn 2012, ICBF has launched a new Replacement Index for beef cows that aims to identify bulls to produce heifers as suitable replacements for the suckler herd.

The *Maternal herd* was established at Teagasc Grange to validate the Replacement Index. The two genotypes are **high** and **low** replacement index groups. These animals were sourced from the dairy and suckler herds and were sired by Aberdeen Angus or Limosuin bulls. Current research carried out in this herd involves detailed observations on cow genotype for performance traits such as: milk production, reproductive efficiency, weaning weight, body weight and body condition score, as well as, detailed feed intake and energy balance measurements. Cows are managed on a low cost spring calving pasture-based system that is focused on maximising grass production in the diet.

