

Grassland Research Programme – Sust. Prod Systems & Systems Analysis
RMIS No. : 5892

Title : Development of optimal management practices for replacement heifers entering the Irish dairy herd

Abstract

With the impending abolition of quotas the Irish dairy industry is going to undergo a major transformation during the forthcoming years. Into the future dairy farmers will increase the stocking rate on the grazing platform necessitating the rearing of replacement heifers on an outside parcel of land. Coupled with this the incomes of beef farmers are decreasing due to falling farm gate prices and higher costs of production. A possible alternative for these farmers is to change the focus of their business into a contract heifer rearing enterprise. Given these reasons there is a requirement to establish target weights at key points during rearing and also to develop a blueprint for replacement dairy heifer rearing based on a distinct parcel of land. Therefore the objective of this proposal is to analyse an existing database to establish target weights in an Irish context and complete a number of component studies in order to determine the optimum pre-weaning rearing strategy as well as overwintering options for weanling heifers. Following the completion of these tasks the optimum treatments will be included in three different systems in order to develop a recommended blueprint for replacement heifer rearing for the Irish dairy industry that takes cognisance of animal performance, cost efficiency and the environment.

Project Leader : Emer Kennedy
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