

KT Beef Farm Improvement Plans – what you need to do **Part 1**

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There are currently over 7,200 Teagasc clients participating in Knowledge Transfer (KT) beef and sheep groups around the country. Year 1 of this programme ends in May and every participant must have completed a farm improvement plan (FIP) with their facilitator before 31 May 2017. The FIP has five components –

1. Teagasc eProfit Monitor
2. Breeding Plan
3. Animal Health Measure
4. Grassland Management Plan
5. Farm health and Safety

We will deal with the first three in this article and the remaining two components will be covered in the March-April issue of *Today's Farm*.

Teagasc eProfit Monitor

Completing an eProfit Monitor is a mandatory but useful deliverable. It allows you to look at the financial performance of your farm in detail with each enterprise (cattle, sheep or tillage) getting its own individual analysis.

Once you have the information on your farm output and costs of production then you can begin to identify areas to focus on for improvement. It gives you a comparison of your farm figures with a target, or with results from other similar farms locally or nationally.

The key data required for the completion of the eProfit Monitor is stock sales and purchases, variable costs and fixed costs. Farmers have all this data available to them but pulling it together and finalising the figures takes time. You should contact your facilitator to complete your profit monitor in early January as this is a quieter time to get paperwork completed before the calving season begins.

The Teagasc eProfit Monitor is specifically designed to help you identify areas on the farm where you can save money and become more efficient for the coming year. eProfit Monitor beef and sheep input sheets can be downloaded from www.teagasc.ie.

Breeding plan

Participants must complete a breeding plan in conjunction with their facilitator and this information will be inputted

onto the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) website.

You will see a KT beef button when logged into your HerdPlus homepage. This is where the breeding plan is completed. Note that ICBF will pre-populate all of your current breeding performance figures for 2016.

However, targets will be required to be inputted for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019. These targets will be set after a discussion between the farmer and the facilitator. Facilitators and farmers must put in a target that they feel is achievable. For example, if the farmer currently has a calving interval of 450 days and calves over eight months.

Is it realistic to assume that over the three years of the programme that this farmer will achieve a calving interval of 365 days and calving spread over 10 weeks? The targets in all the performance indicators should be discussed at length between farmer and facilitator.

The breeding plan has four key performance indicators:

1 Calving performance targets for: calving interval (days), calves per cow per year, heifers calved 22-26 months (%), number of months with a calving.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
1 Calving Interval (days)	This Herd	354		
	Nat. Avg.	399		
	Top 15%	361		
	Target			
	Target			
2 Calves per Cow per Year	This Herd	96		
	Nat. Avg.	83		
	Top 15%	96		
	Target			
	Target			
3 Heifers Calved 22-26 Months (%)	This Herd	27		
	Nat. Avg.	20		
	Top 15%	50		
	Target			
	Target			
4 No. of Months with a Calving	This Herd	7		
	Nat. Avg.	5		
	Top 15%	3		
	Target			
	Target			

2 Euro-Star profile of suckler cows: ICBF will pre-populate the current replacement index figures of the cows and heifers in the herd. It is broken down into cows, females 1+ and females 0-1. Future replacement index targets have then to be set for 2017 to 2019. Farmers have to look at their current herd and think about their own replacement policy on the farm. Some farmers will have very high replacement index figures and may target a slight increase each year, others with low index values may decide to put a policy in place to breed heifers with more

milk and fertility thus increasing the replacement index figure substantially over the programme. The main priority is to have this discussion with your facilitator so that a plan can be put in place.

3 Euro-Star profile of the stock bull: current replacement and terminal figures will be available and a future target required. If you have a young bull on your farm that you intend to keep over the next three years then use his figures as a starting point for future targets. If you intend to change your bull in the near future, decide on whether the bull you buy is for replacement or terminal traits. This will help you to decide on targets after discussion with your facilitator.

4 Beef output ICBF will prepopulate figures for 2016 once the facilitator has put in the number of hectares used for beef production on the farm. When this is completed, 2016 figures for beef output/LU, beef output/ha and stocking rate will be available. Output on your farm is linked to efficiency and stocking rate.

With this in mind it is very important to become efficient in relating to your current breeding performance figures before you even attempt to increase stocking rate. Increased efficiency with current stocking rates will lead to increased output on your farm. It is very important that the farmer and facilitator discuss and set targets for these up until 2019.

Animal health measure

Animal health has been included in the KT programme because the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) wishes to target calf health, biosecurity, parasite control, fertility and lameness as priorities for the next three years. We know that improving calf health, parasite control and fertility while reducing mortality promotes:

- Increased production and profitability on farm.
- Reduced carbon footprint of Irish food.
- Reduced usage of antimicrobial products and associated resistance.
- Reduced labour requirement on farms.
- Better animal welfare.

Over the last few months, 570 vets have received training in relation to their role in the knowledge transfer programme and those who have completed the training are on the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) approved Private Veterinary Practitioner list.

The farmer requires an approved PVP to visit and carry out a health risk assessment on the farm and the practices carried out. The vet will identify priority points that will improve the herd health status and will make some practical recommendations to the farmer. The PVP will then upload this data onto the DAFM portal before 31 May 2017 thus satisfying the requirement of this measure.

Beef farms must complete two animal health measures. One is mandatory and the second is chosen from a menu of options.

- Calf health and biosecurity (mandatory).
- Fertility (option).
- Parasite control (option).
- Lameness (option, dairy only).

For sheep farms, again two animal health measures must be completed.

- Flock health and production (mandatory).
- Lameness (option).
- Parasite control (option).

SUMMARY

- Contact your vet – find out if they have completed KT training.
- Arrange to have your animal health measures completed early in 2017.
- Once you receive the verification code by text, contact the vet.
- Ensure that the data is uploaded by the vet before 31 May 2017.

What must the farmer do?

Vets are made aware of which of their farmer clients are in the KT programme. Some vets may not be trained and therefore will not be eligible to conduct the on-farm risk assessment.

In most cases, each practice will have at least one trained vet. The farmer can choose any trained vet to conduct the animal health measures. It is important that you approach your vet without delay.

The trained vet of your choosing will enter your herd number on to the DAFM web portal system. You will receive a verification code by text message (on the phone where you receive your BVD results). Giving this code to your vet will allow the vet to download your data and commence the animal health measures.

It is important that the quieter months of January and early February are utilised to conduct the animal health measures. It is also very important for you, the farmer, to have the risk assessments conducted at the commencement of the calving or lambing season so that you will get maximum benefit from the recommendations. The risk assessments will be less beneficial to you in May.

The animal health measures must be completed and uploaded onto the DAFM system by 31 May 2017 to qualify for payment.

PVP-delivered group meetings

Each discussion group must attend a meeting delivered by an approved PVP in year one of the programme. The purpose of this meeting is two-fold:

1. To outline what is required in the animal health measures
2. To facilitate group discussion on animal health topics

The feedback from these meetings has been very positive with lots of engagement from farmers. It is clear that there is a hunger for knowledge on animal health and that the potential benefits from this knowledge transfer programme are significant.