

# Commercial Beef Value (CBV) – what is it?

Appearance alone is a poor predictor of beef potential – the CBV will offer buyers and sellers a better estimate of a calf's true value.

**Pearse Kelly**  
Head of drystock  
Knowledge Transfer,  
Teagasc Animal and  
Grassland Research and  
Innovation Programme.



There are over 23,000 beef farms nationally who buy stock that they take through to slaughter or rear and sell on as live animals. Currently, they are buying calves, weanlings and store cattle based entirely on what they see in front of them.

Not knowing whether an animal is bred from good or bad stock in terms of beef genetics, and therefore likely performance, is a serious disadvantage. This is changing thanks to the new Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) Commercial Beef Value (CBV). Any stock destined for the beef trade who have their sire recorded at birth can now have a CBV generated for them.

“The CBV is an exciting new development for the industry,” says Chris Daly, ICBF. “Since its inception, ICBF has largely catered for breeding herds – dairy and suckler. The CBV is a genetic value tailored specifically to the needs of the farmer buying animals to take through to slaughter. Farmers will have access it in the mart ring, but also through their HerdPlus accounts.”

## Commercial Beef Value

The CBV is a value that ICBF is now generating on all cattle that are likely to be finished as beef cattle. This includes all male and female (non-pedigree) stock bred from beef cows, dairy-bred male and female calves sired by a beef bull and male calves sired by a dairy bull.

**Table 1:** Commercial Beef Value (CBV) cut-off values for top 20%, average and bottom 20%.

|                     | Suckler | Dairy x beef | Dairy x dairy |
|---------------------|---------|--------------|---------------|
| Top 20% (5-star)    | >€302   | >€124        | >€44          |
| Average             | €248    | €69          | €24           |
| Bottom 20% (1-star) | <€178   | <€44         | <€1           |

Source: ICBF – based on the January 2022 evaluation.



Aidan Maguire with his Teagasc advisor David Argue.

The CBV is calculated for each animal using their terminal index, but does not include the traits for calving difficulty, gestation length and mortality.

These traits are not needed when the stock you are buying is not going to be bred from.

The CBV measures the potential the animal has for carcass weight, carcass conformation, carcass fat, feed intake and docility (all based on the breeding indexes of its parents).

Put simply, cattle that have a high CBV will, on average, be faster growing, better shaped at slaughter,

leaner and will not eat as much per kg liveweight gained. They will also be more docile.

Cattle that have a low CBV will, on average, be poor for many of these traits.

High CBV cattle are therefore worth more than low CBV cattle. Knowing whether animals are high or low for CBV allows the buyer to make a much more informed decision about how much should be paid for each.

## What's a good CBV figure?

CBV values will be a lot more use to the buyer if they compare like with like. A beef calf bred from a suckler cow is almost always going to have a much higher beef merit than a Holstein Friesian bull calf bred from a dairy cow.

It makes sense for the farmer buying suckler-bred animals to compare them with other suckler-bred animals. A farmer buying dairy male

calves should compare their CBV with those of similar animals.

A 'within breed type' star-rating has been included in the CBV, which will help farmers identify the best animals within the breed type that they are buying.

Table 1 shows the CBV for the top 20%, bottom 20% and average for the three breed types.

It is important to remember that genetic breeding values only improve your chances of making the right decision. They are not always right. Favourites don't always win horse races and the 40-1 outsider sometimes beats the odds and wins.

However, on average across a large number of horse races, the favourites always earn the most prize money and the outsiders, by comparison, make very little. The CBV is no different.

Not all high CBV animals will make the most money and low CBV animals will not always end up with low value carcasses.

If you consistently buy higher CBV stock within the type of animals you buy and avoid buying low CBV stock within the same category, you will be massively increasing your chances of purchasing the better bred animals.

After that, the only decision that



has to be made is how much extra you are willing to pay per head for higher CBV stock.

In all likelihood, until CBV becomes mainstream among purchasers, there is unlikely to be a significant difference in the costs for high, versus low, CBV animals.

#### Where are the CBV values?

All commercial beef cattle that have a sire recorded for them at birth now have a CBV generated by ICBF. If you are signed up to ICBF HerdPlus online service, you can look it up today for the stock you already have.

When you log into to your account under the 'View Profiles' tab at the top of the screen, you will find 'Commercial Beef Value (CBV)'. Once you

select that, all of the stock on your farm that are eligible to have a CBV are displayed, and if they have a sire recorded for them, a CBV will be given.

Each animal is labelled under one of three breed types: dairy x dairy, dairy x beef or suckler. Apart from a CBV value, they are also given both a 'within breed type' and 'across breed' star rating. The five traits that make up the CBV are also displayed, showing a value for each animal for each trait. One animal might have a high CBV due to very good expected carcass weight, whereas another may be high due an expected high conformation score.

» Continued on next page

## WE'RE HANDING DOWN A 15%\* SAVING TO FARMERS.

Talk to Ireland's leading farm insurer for a great quote on your farm insurance plus get an extra 15%\* discount when you get quotes for more than one product.

Visit your local branch or call 0818 617 697 to find out more.

\*Terms and conditions and normal underwriting criteria apply. 15% discount available on a new policy when you have an existing FBD Insurance policy in place or get multiple quotes at the same time.



FBD Insurance Group Ltd trading as FBD Insurance is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Farm Insurance is underwritten by FBD Insurance plc.



Pat Collins, Castlemartyr, Co Cork.

» Continued from page 7

### CBV at purchase?

It's one thing being able to see the CBV of the stock you already have on your farm. The real advantage, of course, is going to be when you can see it for the stock you are thinking about buying.

If you are buying animals directly from another farmer, you can ask them for a print out of the CBV of the stock they are selling.

Once they are in HerdPlus and have recorded the sires of their calves, farmers have access to this information. If they don't record the sires and you want to continue buying their stock, ask them to record sires on all births in the future.

Having the CBV displayed on the marts screens along with all of the other information shown for cattle in the sale ring will be a huge advantage to buyers. ICBF is currently working with marts to get the CBV displayed for eligible animals.

### Is CBV for sellers?

While it is obvious that the CBV will be a great tool for calf and cattle buyers, it can also be of benefit to the farmer who is selling stock. If you are breeding calves, weanlings or store cattle for sale that have above average beef merit when compared to similar breeds of cattle on sale, then this should be reflected in the CBV values of your stock.

These higher CBV values can be highlighted to potential buyers, whether through on-farm sales or when selling through the mart.

If the CBV of your stock is below average compared to their counterparts for sale, what can be done? The beef genetic merit of the bull that is being used should be examined first. If you are using a stock bull, should he be replaced with a higher genetic merit bull?

If you are using beef AI, look at the sires you are using and consider changing them to higher beef merit bulls. If changing the bulls used in a herd is not having a big impact on the

CBV of the calves, they are producing then you have to look at the cow type you have.

The cow makes up 50% of the genetics of the calf and if she is lacking in beef merit, it will be difficult to make progress quickly.

"CBV could encourage the breeders, mostly dairy farmers, to use beef straws on some of their cows or improve the quality of any bulls they might be using for 'mopping up'," concludes Aidan Maguire, Navan, Co Meath.

"Beef and dairy farmers could work together to generate a bit more for everyone. Sellers should be able to get a better price and the buyers should benefit from higher animal performance."

"The CBV could take off if farmers hear about it and understand its potential," says Pat Collins, Castlemartyr, Co Cork.

"There's no easy money in beef and if we can generate more margin by utilising good genetics, that makes sense to me."