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Developments in the Banner county

Anthony Mulligan and Ciaran Lenehan visited the farm of Clare BETTER farm participant Sean Hayes

Sean Hayes runs a 60-cow suckler-to-beef farm near Tulla. The farm consists of 140 acres (64ha) and is fragmented in layout (broken up into two blocks) and the herd is both autumn- and spring-calving.

The aim for Sean is to push his cow numbers out to 75 by the end of the programme. This will be done through breeding all his own replacements. The autumn-calving herd will be brought up to 30 cows and the spring-calving herd will be increased to 45.

Last year, the herd took a bit of a hit because of an underactive bull running with the cows who was failing to get cows in-calf. Luckily, Sean was quick to notice this and intervened quickly by introducing a replacement bull. However, some cows did not go back in-calf on time before the end of the allocated breeding season and were subsequently culled from the herd.

Sean was selling his cattle as stores up until last year, when the decision was made on entry to the programme to finish his stock as it was seen to be a more profitable system from the results of the farms from phase one and two of the BETTER farm programme.

New silage slab

Even though Sean was lucky enough to have had adequate silage to get him through the spring, there was still need for some expansion as herd numbers are still growing.

A new concrete silage pit has been erected on the farm with a total storage capacity of 500t. The two slabs are 60ft by 30ft, with 8ft high concrete walls around

them, and a 60ft by 47ft concrete apron at the front.

Over the next couple of months, Sean also intends to build a new slatted shed with creep area at the back.

Silage

Silage ground was closed on 21 March and got around 80 units of nitrogen per acre and two bags of 0-7-30. Half of the silage ground got 2,500gals of slurry. The silage was cut last Thursday, shaken out on Friday morning and left to wilt for a couple of hours. On Friday evening, it was raked and taken in with a silage wagon.

Breeding

There was a pre-breeding scan done on all spring-calving cows to identify non-cycling animals. This helps affected cows to get extra treatment early in the breeding season and not let their calving interval slip above 365 days.

Sean told us of the protocol for any problem cows on his farm.

"I would usually scan cows from around 42 days post-calving. The problem cows would be firstly given a shot of estrumate or a shot of metracure for a really dirty cow.

"If that didn't work to get them back cycling again, they would be put on a synchronisation programme. It is a 10-day synchronisation programme. On day one, CIDR is put in along with a shot of GnRH. On day seven, a shot of estrumate is given. On day eight, CIDR is taken out. On day nine, a second shot of GnRH is given and on day 10 the cow is artificially inseminated.

Sean is very passionate about his breeding and uses a lot of AI, typically selecting continental sires. Limousin is his preferred cow type, though milk is hugely important.

In terms of AI sires, Sean is using Tom-schoice Iceberg (ZXT), Elderberry Galahad



A Belgian Blue-cross heifer out at grass on Sean's outfarm.

- Fixed costs: €550/ha
- €/hr labour: €7
- Cashflow: €5/ha

Calving pattern	Spring/autumn
Farm system	Suckler to bull beef
Farm size	64ha
2017 gross margin	€505/ha
Land type	Variable

(EBY) for heifers and Knockmoyle10 Loki (CH4159) for mature cows.

Autumn-born bulls

Last year's autumn-born calves have been weaned and are currently out on grass. These bulls will be grazed on grass until September. If the weather deteriorates throughout the summer, the option is

*Guide to traffic lights

Fixed costs:

- €<350/ha
- €350-550/ha
- >€550/ha

€/hr worked:

- >€12.50/hr
- €12.50-15/hr
- <€12.50/hr

Cashflow: (consecutive months without sales- inc. sheep)

- <5
- 5-7
- >7

36

Number of cows already bred this year

71

KG DM/ha grown in the last week

80

Units N spread on all silage ground

500

Capacity of new silage pit (tonnes)

443

Average carcass weight of first slaughtered bulls

there to take them in earlier.

Meal will be introduced to the bulls around mid-August and by the time of housing these bulls will be eating up to 3kg of meal and be a target group average weight of 500kg. These weanlings were an average weight of 326kg on 15 May. When the bulls are housed they will be gradually built up to ad-lib and hopefully be ready for the Christmas market.

There was a spring-calving survey conducted on the BETTER beef farms on weaning efficiency last year and Sean had both the heaviest weanlings overall and the best weaning efficiency of 50%.

Finishing bulls

Sean had an excellent record of achieving good liveweights for age prior to entry to the programme and is no different at present. The first batch of this year's bulls left the farm for slaughter on 9 May. They had an average carcass weight of 443kg, with an average carcass grade of U and a fat score of +2. Fourteen bulls remain on the farm for further feeding, five of which will soon be ready for slaughter and the nine younger bulls will be fed on.



Sean's new silage pits were completed just in time for silage 2018.



A topline view of a bull quickly approaching slaughter weight.



VIDEO ONLINE
watch the video on farmersjournal.tv