

Finishing heifers

Good margins can be made from finishing heifers if the appropriate system is chosen. They are unlikely to attain the carcass weight of bulls or steers but they are often cheaper to purchase. The killing out percentage will be lower than bulls and steers due to variation between the growth of tissues. But some of this will be offset because they're smaller and as such have lower maintenance requirements.

The breed and type of system they originate from will dictate how they are managed and the time involved in finishing them. Beef-bred heifers are often born in spring and autumn while dairy-bred heifers can be born at any time of the year. Larger framed heifers, often the continental breeds, are later maturing and therefore grow faster and to heavier weights. Many of the native breeds are smaller framed and slower growing, their daily liveweight gain is lower than that of the larger-framed breed.

The most efficient way to manage cattle is to group them in even batches for type, breed etc. so that the nutrition is matched to their requirements.

There are three phases of growth and due to the fact that heifers lay down fat earlier than steers, the growing phase must be managed correctly to ensure they reach their full potential. The liveweight gain during the growing phase is dependent on the breed and frame of the heifer – this will be between 0.6 and 0.8kg/head/per day. Getting the nutrition right at each stage of growth will ensure the heifers grow to their optimum which is why analysing feed is so important when compiling the ration.

What comes out the other end is also a good indicator of how the rumen is functioning. Loose manure, foamy manure and large particles of undigested feed are all indicators that something is wrong.

Growth should be monitored with regular weighing of the stock.

Finishing heifers at grass is particularly suited to spring-born heifers. Native breeds can finish off on grass, with some concentrates in late summer, by 17-18 months of age at 500kg liveweight (260kg deadweight). Continental crosses will finish at 550kg liveweight (290kg deadweight) when on grass with the addition of some cereals.

Autumn born continental heifers are best grazed rotationally during their first grazing season to ensure they grow a good frame but then finished indoors.

Extensive systems with smaller framed native heifers with a slower liveweight gain can have a second grazing season to ensure acceptable weights are achieved.

Growing phase diet	Finishing phase diet
15-16% Crude Protein	12-15% Crude Protein
10.5-11.4 MJ/kg DM	12.2 MJ/kg DM
More than 40% digestible fibre	More than 25% digestible fibre
Less than 3% fat	Less than 6% fat
Less than 20% starch and sugar	Less than 33% starch and sugar
Minerals, vitamins	Minerals, vitamins

Typical weights and target growth rates for beef heifers

	Small framed	Medium framed	Large framed
Overall DLWG kg/hd/day	0.8	0.9	1.0
Finished liveweight kg	500	550	600
Finished deadweight kg	270	300	340

Take a look at the BRP manual on [Feeding, growing and finishing cattle for Better Returns](#) for more information