

Sarah Pick, AHDB Beef & Lamb Beef Specialist



Sarah Pick

In November Marc Jones, Charlie Morgan, Graham Parks, Andrew Crow, Tim Phipps and I were involved in a two-day study trip to Ireland. We visited several farms which are involved in the BETTER Farms Programme, which aims to develop a roadmap for profitable beef production by improving technical efficiencies on farm. We also went to the suckler beef research demonstration farm at the Teagasc Beef Research Centre in Grange, County Meath.

The first farm that we visited was Chris McCarthy's in County Westmeath. Chris has 55 continental-cross suckler cows and



operates a suckler to weaned calf system. He has improved his grassland management through the introduction of paddocks. This has increased the number of grazing divisions from eight large fields to 17 individually grazed paddocks. Grass growth and animal performance has improved with this change in management, with paddocks being grazed within three days and then given three weeks to recover.



To ensure calves always have access to the most-digestible grass when Chris set up the electric fencing, he ensured the wire was high enough to allow calves to forward creep graze.

In the afternoon, we visited Richard Williamson who operates a suckler-to-beef system, calving around 90 Aberdeen Angus-cross cows. Steers were finished by 22 months with 50% being finished off grass, the majority of

heifers were finished off grass at 18-22 months old.

Richard has improved his grassland management through the creation of paddocks and improved nutrient management. Soils are regularly tested and lime and compound fertilisers applied where necessary. Due to improved grassland management, Richard manages to turn his yearlings out to grass earlier, which allows him to keep his housing and feeding costs down.



December 2015

The Derrypatrick herd, situated at the Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, presented the group with best practices with regards to grassland management.

The farm operates a high stocking rate of 2.7 livestock units per ha, achieved through rotational grazing and high application of organic nitrogen to the grassland. In 2015, grass growth measured 10,593kg DM per ha. The table below shows the results of their 2015 silage analysis.



Analysis	1 st Cut	2 nd Cut	Surplus
Dry Matter (%)	27.9	25.6	49.4
pH	3.6	3.9	4.7
Crude Protein (%)	11.8	11	11.8
D Value	78	72	73



The final farm we visited was Ben Sweeney's, which is part of the Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef programme. This initiative aimed to advise beef producers on the rearing, growing and finishing of purchased dairy-bred calves. Ben rears 150 Friesian bulls and 25 Aberdeen Angus heifers, everything is taken to slaughter. The Friesian bulls are finished at 18 to 20 months and the heifers are finished at 20 months. Ben aims for his cattle to put on as many kilos of liveweight as possible from grass.

The study tour was interesting and motivational for all involved - it was great to see good grassland management in practice.

Report produced by Sarah Pick, AHDB Beef & Lamb Beef Specialist.

For more information contact sarah.pick@ahdb.org.uk