

Tracking performance of finishing cattle

Profit in any beef finishing system relies on cattle increasing in value by more than it costs to keep them. Without the ongoing monitoring of performance and production costs farmers can find themselves slow to react to market conditions.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as daily liveweight gain (DLWG) can be used to monitor performance regularly on an individual basis, allowing management changes to be made if an animal, or group of animals are not performing as well as expected.

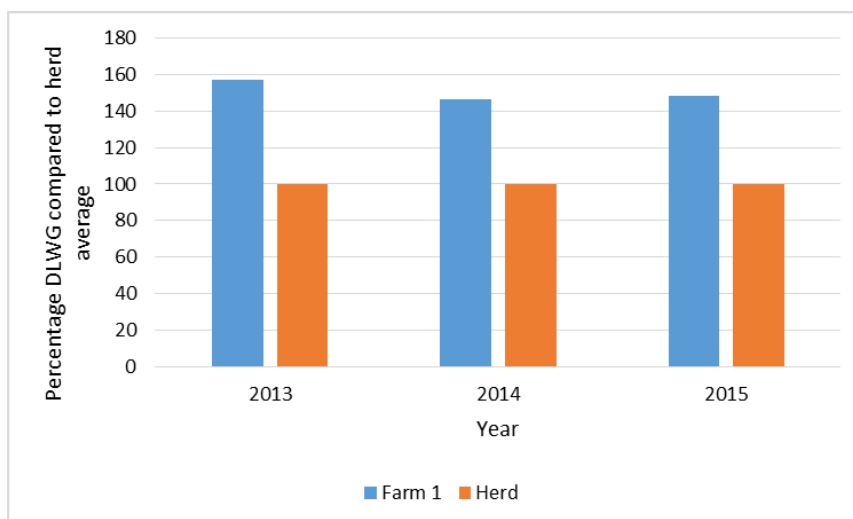


The Beef KPI project, which is funded by AHDB Beef & Lamb, is working with farmers, industry professionals and academics to evaluate current KPIs and develop further indices for all sectors of the beef industry.

DLWG can be calculated for cattle over the growing and finishing period and used to predict sale dates. It can be monitored between seasons to identify seasonal trends, or between batches (for example different ages or breeds) to identify which type of cattle perform best within the system.

Andrew Laughton, a beef finisher from Louth in Lincolnshire, is one of the farmers involved in the beef KPI project and weighs his cattle regularly to track animal performance. All animals are EID tagged, which allows Andrew to link weight data with where the cattle were sourced from as well as other information such as health treatments and carcass value.

Figure 1 shows how cattle from one source (Farm 1) consistently grow better during their time on the finishing unit compared to the herd average. These cattle are vaccinated during the rearing and growing stages and travel in one batch direct from farm, highlighting the potential benefits of an integrated supply chain in which the previous management history of the cattle is known, allowing them to be managed accordingly and any performance potential check in minimised.



Andrew also records fat classification data to ensure he is producing the right animal for the market. The majority of processors require a carcass with a fat level of between 3 and 4L. Figure 2 shows the percentage of animals sold falling into each fat classification, highlighting that over the last three years nearly 80% of the animals Andrew has finished have been within target. Compared to lean (muscle) tissue, it takes four times more energy to deposit 1kg of fat tissue. It is therefore important to assess fat cover regularly on finishing cattle to avoid excessive fat which is costly to produce and will be trimmed off by the processor.



Figure 2: Percentage of animals sold falling into each fat classification, 2013 – 2015

Further information on the general topic of collecting data on farm can be found in the BRP Manual, [Assessing the business for Better Returns](#)