

Beef Feed Efficiency Programme

Soon over 850 cattle will have completed feed intake recording as part of the Beef Feed Efficiency Programme. The programme is sourcing calves for the commercial units from dairy and suckler herds.



One dairy producer who has supplied calves to the project is David Harrison of Dundraw Farm, Cumbria. David farms 480 dairy cows with the aim of using sexed semen on 200 of his cows to produce female dairy calves. The remainder are put to a beef bull using a mix of artificial insemination (AI) and natural service. The best of the female beef calves are sold at 16-20 months as bulling heifers, while the remaining heifers and male beef calves are finished on farm at approximately 24 months of age. David has adopted a policy of using Limousin AI sires with high genetic merit as they produce an excellent beef-cross-dairy bulling heifer, for which there is strong demand.

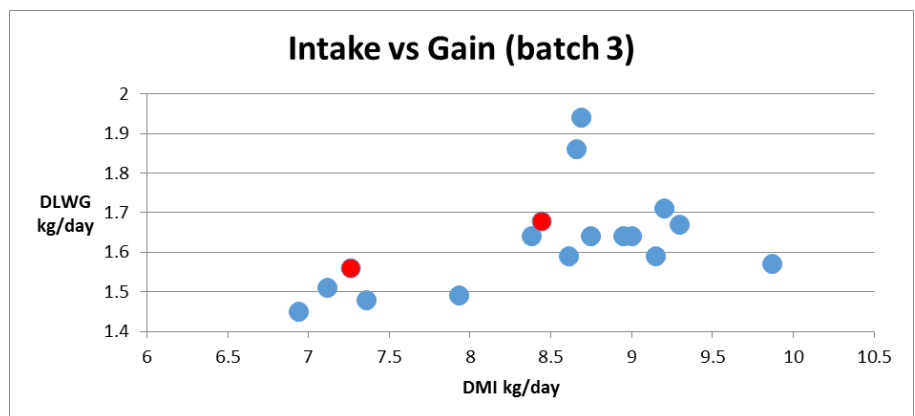
To date, Mr Harrison has supplied the project with 39 calves sired by five different bulls and plans to provide more in the future. The objective is to collect feed intake and performance data from around eight calves per sire from over 200 Limousin bulls used across the UK.

Calves from Dundraw Farm have performed well while on test, with daily liveweight gains of around 1.5kg per day and average dry matter intake averaging just over 8kg per day. David's cattle were the only dairy-bred calves in the batch and compared to the average weight of the cattle in their group, were lighter when the group started feed intake recording.

The ration fed is based on grass silage, barley and a protein supplement typical of the majority of commercial growing rations.

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between gain and intake for the sire groups in batch 3 at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). Cattle with high growth rates and low feed intake are the most feed efficient. David had two sire groups represented in this batch (shown by the red circles), and they produced significantly different results. The higher circle represents a progeny group of calves that had faster growth rates but ate 1.3kg per day more to achieve this.

Figure 1: Feed intake and performance of cattle in Batch 3 of the Beef Efficiency Programme



David recognises the potential of the project to enable selective breeding for cattle which eat less than others but grow at the same rate, which could mean big savings in feed costs across the beef industry.

While the initial focus of the programme will be on recording Limousin-sired cattle, the aim is to develop a system for recording feed efficiency that can be extended to other cattle breeds in the future.

The programme is currently looking to source Limousin and Aberdeen Angus-sired calves. More information is available on the AHDB Beef & Lamb [website](http://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk).

Commercial beef farm sought

AHDB is seeking to recruit one commercial beef farm where feed efficiency measurements in growing beef cattle can be recorded for the Beef Feed Efficiency Programme.

The farm must:

- Have a good handling system
- Be equipped to feed a total mixed ration
- Be able to install specific feeding equipment to enable the recording of individual feed intake of cattle.

Feed intake recording equipment will be provided. Payment will be based on successful delivery of the required records.

A range of suckler-bred and dairy-cross beef cattle will come on to the farm for periods of around three months at a time. During this period they will be group housed, fed a defined ration and weighed regularly.

The project is looking for a producer that:

- Can demonstrate high levels of management on their current unit
- Has the capacity to purchase the cattle required for measurement
- Has an aptitude for accurate record keeping and communication
- Is willing to spend time showing visitors around the unit and promoting the project.

Farms should be located in England, north of the M4, or in Wales.

For more information, please contact Natalie Cormack on 07866 934563
or email natalie.cormack@ahdb.org.uk

The closing date for receipt of applications is **5pm 15 July 2017**.

