

AI usage

AI usage is covered in the replacement strategy of the Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP). The terms and conditions state that "From 30th June 2016 at least 80% of the AI used on participating holdings must be from 4 or 5 star bulls on either the Terminal or Replacement Index (on a within or an across breed basis)".

As last week's article outlined, genomic indexes will be available for AI sires in August. This, of course, means that there will be a two-month period between the AI criteria coming into play and genomic indexes becoming available for AI sires.

Advice

Just as last week's article advised on the purchase of replacement females or stock bulls, the advice on AI bulls is the same. Use the highest-index bulls available so as to allow for any potential fluctuations on genomic indexes. €74 is currently the 4 star across breed cut-off on the Replacement Index.

Using bulls with a Replacement Index of €100 and above allows for bulls to potentially drop and still be of a high enough index for the programme. Where low-reliability bulls are being used then it is advisable to use them as part of a team. Using a team of bulls helps to spread risk.

Using five bulls with an average reliability of 30% is as effective as using one bull with a reliability of 85%. Where proven bulls (>85% reliability) are being used, then fewer bulls are required as their indexes are much less likely to change in the future.

Active Bull List

The ICBF Active Bull List is an online tool which allows you to view all available AI bulls in one list. Bulls are ranked on both

the Replacement and Terminal Index. It can be accessed on the ICBF website www.icbf.com and by clicking on "Active Bull Lists" underneath the bull search on the right hand side of the home page.

Select either the Replacement or Terminal options. Table 1 details the number of bulls on the Active Bull List that meet the Replacement and Terminal Index requirements, both within and across breed.

Talk to your AI technician

The Active Bull List is hosted on the ICBF website but is kept up to date by the AI companies themselves. While in the vast majority of cases the availability details of bulls on the list will be up to date, you are advised to contact your AI company, area rep or technician with queries on the availability of bulls, price and to ensure that your technician has semen of particular bulls that you require in stock.

The price quoted on the Active Bull List is the straw price only. Again, you will have to contact your AI company to find out what the call-out and insemination fees are.

May proofs

As of last week the bull search, online Euro-Star profiles and Active Bull List have been updated with the May proofs. This evaluation run does not have genomics included. Genomic Euro-Star indexes will not be available for any beef animals until August. While there has been no major change in animal ranking in an overall context, individual animals will have changed. It is important for farmers to look at these updated indexes.

This can be done online through the Euro-Star profile or by generating an updated BDGP report. Updated BDGP reports will be generated and made available for farmers to access online.



John Flannery and Derek O'Donoghue looking over the suckler herd at Pallaskenry Agricultural College.

Q&A

Q. Do I have to use AI if I am participating in the BDGP?

A. No. AI is not a compulsory element of the BDGP.

Q. What if I am using AI and a stock bull? Do I have to satisfy both requirements?

A. Yes, if you are using both AI and stock bulls you will have to meet the 80% 4 or 5 star AI requirement and have at least one genotyped 4 or 5 star stock bull on the holding by 30 June 2019 and again on 30 June 2020. Where this stock bull is replaced in the period to 30 June 2020, it must be replaced with a bull that is also genotyped 4 or 5 star."

FARMER FOCUS: PALLASKENRY AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

€115 to be gained per cow

Name: Pallaskenry Agricultural College, Pallaskenry, Co Limerick

Farming system: Suckler to beef

Four- and five-star females: Cows: 17 Heifers: 36

Stock bull or AI: Two rounds of AI with stock bull mopping up.

Replacement strategy: Buy in initially and breed from within afterwards.

Derek O'Donoghue and John Flannery are principal and teacher respectively at the Salesian Agricultural College in Pallaskenry, Co Limerick. The college currently runs a 35-cow suckler herd alongside a 250-cow dairy herd. The suckler herd is currently in transition to a high Replacement Index model. Derek and John describe the Pallaskenry herd and how the college plans to transform its suckler enterprise.

Tell me about your farming system

Currently we have a herd of 35 autumn-calving cows, although traditionally the number was 50 to 55 and we plan to go back up in numbers. Calving is from November to January with the progeny taken through to slaughter. The cows are predominantly of Charolais, Limousin and Simmental breeding, with many cows being 75% continental or more. Traditionally a mixture of AI and stock bull was used. Last autumn, we culled the Limousin stockbull, a Mas Du Clo son who had a Replacement Index of €29 (1 star). He graded U+ with a carcass weight of 657kg. He was an excellent bull to produce weanlings and stock for finishing but we found his replacements to be lacking in fertility and milk. He was purely a terminal sire. At present we have an Angus bull with a Replacement Index of €128 (5 Star). He is running with the cows since 2 May.

What are your plans for the suckler herd?

We plan to put in place a high Replacement Index herd, targeting an average index of €180 for the entire herd. To do this we need to purchase high-Replacement Index heifers to breed from, as breeding from within the herd, while achievable, will take much more time. Achieving a suckler herd with an average Replacement Index of >€180 would place us in the top 1% of commercial herds, the suckler herd equivalent of the top 200 EBI dairy herds.

At present, the average Replacement Index of our cows is €65 (3 star). If we can achieve our target index of €180, the increase should be worth €115 per cow per calving. Across 55 cows, that equates to €6,325 per year – too much money to ignore.

What will be your breeding strategy for the herd moving forward?

We plan to breed to AI using the highest available Replacement Index bulls on the ICBF Active Bull List, while striving to keep a balance between maternal (milk and fertility) traits and beef (carcass) traits. Bull choice will be on Replacement Index and not breed. Synchronisation and fixed-time AI will greatly facilitate the use of AI, and the first repeats will by default also be synchronised. After two rounds of AI, a stock bull will be left to mop up. Last week, we purchased two Angus stock bulls by ZLL, currently the highest-ranking Replacement Index AI bull on the ICBF Active Bull List. One bull has a Replacement Index of €200, while the other is €187. Currently they are running with Friesian heifers in our dairy herd but as mature bulls they will join the suckler herd next year.

Table 1: Number of AI bulls on the ICBF Active Bull List meeting the 4 & 5 star criteria.

	4 & 5 star within breed	4 & 5 star across breed
Replacement Index	280	203
Terminal Index	242	237

DATES FOR THE DIARY

➔ 25th May 2016 - Newford Suckler Demonstration Herd National Open Day, Athenry, Co Galway, 2pm-7pm. For more info go to www.newfordsucklerbeef.ie.