

## 2020: STABLE PRIME CATTLE THROUGHPUT

During the first quarter of 2020 prime cattle throughput in Northern Ireland was expected to record a decline due to a reduction in cattle availability for slaughter however as yet this has not materialised.

During quarter 1 throughput in local plants was forecast to be back 5.5 per cent or about 4,700 head however this has failed to materialise with prime cattle throughput during 2020 to date running fairly similar to 2019 levels.

### Prime cattle killed younger

Analysis of the price reporting system has indicated that prime cattle processed in Northern Ireland plants during 2020 to date have been slightly younger and heavier than previous years which will have contributed to cattle throughput running ahead of expected levels.

During 2020 to date price reported heifers were an average of 771 days at point of slaughter (25.3 months). This was back from 776 days (25.5 months) in the same period last year however despite this decline the average carcass weight increased by 6kg to 329kg in the 2020 period.

Price reported steers were an average of 766 days (25.2 months) during 2020

to date, back from 779 days (25.6 months). Despite steers being killed almost two weeks earlier the average carcass weight increased by 3kg to 363kg during 2020 to date.

Price reported young bulls passing through local plants were an average of 494 days during 2020 to date, back from 506 days in the same period in 2019. Despite this decline the average carcass weight was 5kg heavier at 338kg.

This reduction in the age at slaughter and heavier carcass weights during 2020 to date would indicate that cattle are coming fit for slaughter earlier this year. This may be due to a better performance of cattle at grass last summer resulting in cattle being heavier at housing or producers may have decided to push cattle to finish quicker.

### Cattle on the ground

With prime cattle throughput running ahead of expected levels there has been a further reduction in the number of cattle available for slaughter on local farms as indicated in **Table 1**. Cattle in the 18-24 months and 24-30 month age brackets will provide the bulk of prime cattle throughput for local processors over the next six months of 2020.

At the end of February 2020 there were 164,848 cattle for beef production aged from 18-24 months on local farms. This was a decline of 10,601 head or 6 per cent from the same time in 2019. Most of this decline in numbers is due to fewer beef sired cattle on local farms which stems from strong declines in calf registrations during 2018.

There were a further 84,204 cattle for beef production aged from 24-30 months on local farms at the end of February 2020, this was back by 5,462 head or 6.1 per cent from year earlier levels.

### Forecast

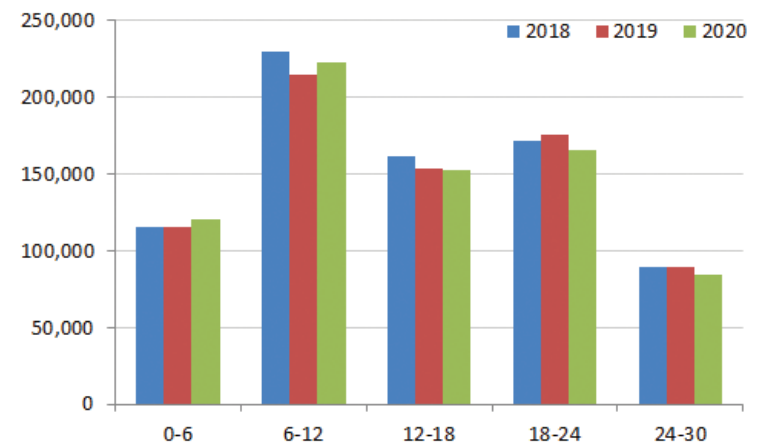
These figures would indicate that cattle supplies for slaughter will tighten as the year progresses but with cattle numbers in younger age groups stabilising there may be a recovery in supplies towards the end of the year.

The forecast prime cattle kill in Northern Ireland for 2020 was in the region of 332,000 head, back 12,000 from 2019 levels and despite prime cattle throughput currently holding steady a decline in annual throughput during 2020 is still expected provided that there are no changes to current levels of cattle imports/exports.

**Table 1: Cattle on farms in Northern Ireland for beef production by age category February 2020**

Age (months)	2018	2019	2020	2019/2020	2018/2020
0-6	115,455	115,151	120,520	+4.7%	+4.4%
6-12	229,183	214,471	222,812	+3.9%	-2.8%
12-18	161,210	153,707	151,966	-1.1%	-5.7%
18-24	171,785	175,449	164,848	-6.0%	-4.0%
24-30	89,279	89,666	84,204	-6.1%	-5.7%
30 +	318,053	314,259	297,884	-5.2%	-6.3%

**Figure 1: Cattle on farms in Northern Ireland for beef production by age category February 2020**



## CHANGES TO LMC WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

In accordance with Government advice re COVID-19, the Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) remains open for business, but we have reorganised some of our services in order to safeguard the health and safety of our stakeholders and staff.

From Monday 23rd March 2020 the office building will be closed to the public and we are postponing all face to face meetings/non-essential social contact/external events until further notice. Our normal telephone lines remain open as outlined in the box below.

**LMC main switchboard number is still available on 02892633000**

**NIFCC main number is still available on 02892633017**

**FQAS Helpline is still available on 02892633024**

Alternatively you may wish to email our staff directly or send a message through the 'Contact us' page of our website [www.lmci.com](http://www.lmci.com) and we will respond to your query as soon as possible. Please ensure that you

include your contact details, including a telephone number. Individual members of staff can be contacted via main switchboard, their direct lines or by email.

### FQAS Inspections

Following an emergency meeting of the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) Industry Board all face to face farm inspections have been deferred due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This policy came into effect from Wednesday 18th March at 5pm.

FQAS continues to operate and participants' assured status will continue to be certified during the period of inspection deferral. Members whose renewals fall due will be invited to pay the annual renewal fee in order to continue participation in the scheme. Members will be advised to pay online during this period.

Our website remains up to date, as do our social media channels. Further updates will be available through website and social media channels.

## INCREASE IN CATTLE IMPORTS FOR FURTHER PRODUCTION

During the first two months of 2020 there were just under 4,104 cattle imported from ROI further production on local farms. This is the highest level of cattle import for breeding and production recorded since early 2015.

Of the 4,104 cattle imported from ROI during the first two months of 2020 80 per cent were female cattle, the majority of which will be used in both the suckler and dairy herds as replacements. There were 3,288 female cattle imported from ROI for further production during the 2020 period, up from 2,055 head in the same time frame last year.

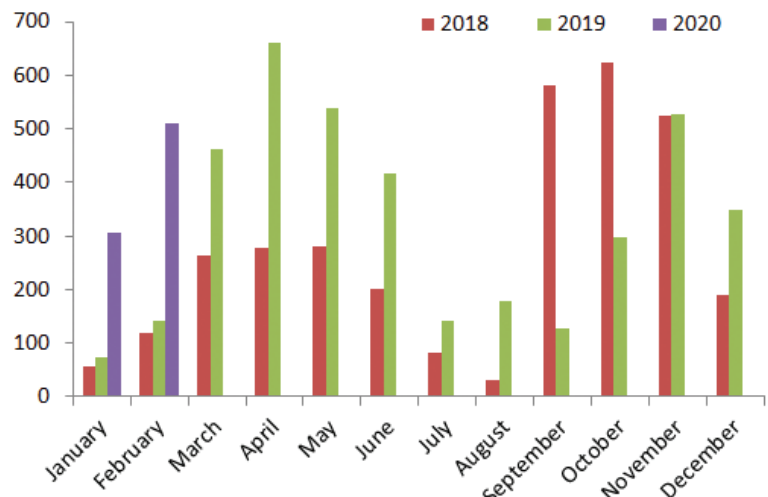
There has also been an increase in the number of male cattle imported from ROI for further production from 216 head to 816 head. This is perhaps the most relevant statistic to the local beef industry. If we consider male cattle aged over 42 days there were 660 animals imported from ROI during January and February 2020, up from 173 head in the same period last year. These animals will predominantly be intended for further production and slaughter in local plants.

There are currently more limited market outlets for beef from these mixed origin cattle. Some of the major processors have indicated that they unwilling to process these types of cattle while others may apply penalties at point of slaughter.

Ireland has customers for beef from these mixed origin cattle but it is important that any producer considering importing cattle from ROI for further feeding or finishing should consult with the procurement staff of the individual processing plants prior to purchase.

However some processors in Northern

**Figure 2: Monthly imports of male cattle aged >42 days from ROI for further production 2018-2020**



### FQAS Helpline

If you have had a recent inspection and need help and advice to rectify any non-conformances, contact the FQAS helpline:  
Tel: 028 9263 3024

### Answerphone Service

Factory Quotes & Mart Results  
Updated 5pm Daily  
Tel: 028 9263 3011

### Text Service

Free weekly price quotes sent to your mobile phone  
Email - [bulletin@lmci.com](mailto:bulletin@lmci.com)  
Tel: 028 9263 3000

# WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS

## CATTLE TRADE

### NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 16/03/20	Next Week 23/03/20
<b>Prime</b>		
U-3	324 - 336p	324 - 334p
R-3	318 - 330p	318 - 328p
O+3	312 - 324p	312 - 322p
P+3	264 - 278p	264 - 276p
Including bonus where applicable		
<b>Cows</b>		
O+3 & better	240 - 250p	240 - 250p
Steakers	140 - 170p	140 - 170p
Blues	120 - 130p	120 - 130p

Cow quotes vary depending on weight and grade. Pricing policies vary from plant to plant. Producers are advised to check pricing policies before presenting cattle for slaughter.

### Deadweight Cattle Trade

The deadweight trade for prime cattle held steady this week with base quotes generally ranging from 330-334p/kg for in spec U-3 grading steers and heifers. Quotes for good quality O+3 grading cows have remained steady at 240-250p/kg with reports of a steady demand for cow beef.

All of the major beef processing plants are continuing to operate as normal although there are some restrictions in place for those delivering cattle to the plants. The plants have reported strong supplies of prime cattle coming forward for slaughter with throughput last week totalling 7,153 head. This was up by just over 300 head or five per cent from the previous week. Cow throughput has continued at strong levels with 1,953 cows processed last week.

Imports for direct slaughter from ROI last week included 126 prime cattle and 60 cows which is similar to previous weeks. A further 6 prime cattle and 11 cows were imported from GB. A total of 114 cattle were exported from NI to ROI for direct slaughter last week which included 7 clean cattle, 107 cows and 7 bulls. No cattle were exported from NI to GB last week for direct slaughter.

The average steer price in NI last week was 332.4p/kg which was up 1.4p/kg from the previous week. The R3 steer price was up by a similar margin to 340.3p/kg. The average heifer price in NI last week was 333.2p/kg, up marginally from the previous week, while the R3 heifer price was up 2p/kg to 337.9p/kg. The average young bull price was 314.5p/kg, up 4.5p/kg from the previous week. The U3 young bull price was up by a similar margin to 327.7p/kg. Deadweight cow prices were generally back from the previous week with an O3 cow price of 258.5p/kg.

There has been a mixed deadweight prime cattle trade across GB last week although the trade was generally back from the previous week. The average steer price in GB last week was marginally to 335.4p/kg while the R3 steer price was back by half a penny to 341.7p/kg. Steer prices generally improved in Scotland and Southern England and came under pressure in the Midlands and Northern England. The average heifer price in GB last week improved by 1p/kg to 337.5p/kg while the R3 heifer price came back by 1.2p/kg to 342.6p/kg. The deadweight cow trade also recorded some variability across the GB regions last week. Average prices increased in Scotland and the Midlands by 5p/kg and 1.9p/kg respectively while they held steady in Northern England and came back by 4.9p/kg in Southern England. The average cow price in GB last week was 234.3p/kg, 2.9p/kg behind the equivalent price in NI.

Deadweight cattle prices in ROI held steady in euro terms last week however a weakening sterling resulted in all reported prices increasing in sterling terms. The R3 steer price was up by 3p/kg last week to 326.7p/kg while the R3 heifer price increased by 4p/kg to 332.3p/kg. Prime cattle throughput in ROI last week totalled 27,580 head, up from 26,796 head in the same week last year.

### Deadweight Sheep Trade

Base quotes from the plants for R3 grading hoggets came back early this week to 480p/kg up to 22kg however they firmed as the week progressed with quotes of 490-500p/kg up to 22kg expected for early next week. The plants are reporting steady numbers of hoggets to meet demand with 6,101 hoggets processed locally last week. This was up 525 head from the previous week. Exports to ROI for direct slaughter remains an important outlet for the NI sheep sector with 5,009 hoggets exported last week. This was back from 6,266 hoggets the previous week. The deadweight hogget price in NI last week came back by 2.7p/kg to 479.8p/kg while the trade in ROI held steady in sterling terms at 488.7p/kg.

### This week's marts

The marts generally reported strong throughputs of hoggets this week with firm demand for good quality lots, particularly those that meet current market specifications. In Omagh last Saturday 611 hoggets sold from 428-465p/kg compared to 440 hoggets the previous week selling from 432-456p/kg. In Rathfriland this week 470 hoggets sold from 400-470p/kg compared to 409 hoggets last week selling from 420-465p/kg. In Ballymena this week a large entry of 2,007 hoggets sold from 410-485p/kg (avg 430p/kg) compared to 1,355 hoggets last week selling from 400-484p/kg (avg 420p/kg). In Markethill this week 1,000 hoggets sold from 420-474p/kg, an improved trade from last week when 1,080 hoggets sold from 410-452p/kg.

### LAST WEEK'S DEADWEIGHT CATTLE PRICES (UK / ROI)

W/E 14/03/20	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	340.2	336.0	350.2	345.1	346.5	347.3
	R3	340.3	326.7	351.1	342.3	339.5	341.7
	R4	336.9	327.9	350.5	351.2	338.5	347.0
	AVG	329.7	312.4	329.4	322.6	316.7	319.2
Heifers	U3	344.5	344.7	358.7	347.1	351.3	352.1
	R3	341.1	332.3	350.3	343.3	342.0	342.6
	R4	337.9	332.8	350.4	345.4	339.9	345.1
	AVG	329.9	317.4	332.9	321.7	316.2	318.3
Young Bulls	U3	327.7	317.1	338.3	332.7	329.6	333.0
	R3	325.5	306.8	339.2	325.6	331.6	331.1
	O3	310.8	294.8	309.2	298.8	301.5	303.7
	AVG	314.5	-	324.3	305.9	314.8	314.5
Prime Cattle Price Reported	6,074	-	7,286	7,485	8,232	5,220	28,223
Cows	O3	258.5	266.0	260.5	262.8	259.4	259.3
	O4	261.5	266.3	263.4	261.6	258.6	257.9
	P2	221.2	235.2	223.0	214.6	212.1	212.0
	P3	239.5	255.7	229.0	230.3	232.4	229.9
	AVG	237.2	-	255.0	245.8	230.1	234.3

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=88.03p Stg  
(ii) Shading indicates a lower price than the previous week.  
(iii) AVG is the average of all grades in the category, not just those listed

### REPORTED NI CATTLE PRICES - P/KG

W/E 14/03/20	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	339.8	344.3	328.0
R3	337.5	340.3	324.7
O+3	330.5	331.4	315.0

\*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

### REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 14/03/20	Weight Bands			
	<220kg	220-250kg	250-280kg	>280kg
P1	157.4	170.6	176.0	182.9
P2	178.7	199.8	220.6	233.8
P3	191.2	215.5	237.8	242.6
O3	-	235.7	248.5	260.0
O4	176.0	-	246.6	262.2
R3	-	-	-	279.3

## SHEEP TRADE

### NI SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 16/03/20	Next Week 23/03/20
Hoggets up to 22kgs	480p	490-500p

### REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 29/02/20	W/E 07/03/20	W/E 14/03/20
NI L/W Hoggets	444.7	431.1	432.1
NI D/W Hoggets	478.1	482.5	479.8
GB D/W Hoggets	530.3	530.9	539.7
ROI D/W	477.0	488.7	488.7

### LATEST SHEEP MARTS (P/KG LW)

From: 06/03/20		Hoggets			
To: 12/03/20		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	102	403	439	-
Saturday	Swatragh	750	390	443	-
	Omagh	611	428	465	-
Monday	Massereene	967	435	504	-
	Kilrea	230	433	455	-
Tuesday	Rathfriland	470	400	470	418
Wednesday	Ballymena	2007	410	485	430
	Markethill	1,000	420	474	-

Information supplied by LMC / DAERA/ AHDB/ DAFM

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Contact us

T: 028 9263 3000  
E: bulletin@lmcni.com  
W: www.lmcni.com

