

MEETING BEEF SPECIFICATIONS FOR AGE

The majority of specifications from major UK retailers require beef from steers and heifers under 30 months of age while some will also take beef from young bulls under 16 months of age. While there are customers for beef that does not meet this criteria market outlets are much more limited and tend to attract a lower price.

Steers

During 2019 the average age at slaughter of price reported steers was 25.4 months, up marginally from 2018 when the average age at slaughter was 25.1 months. The average age at slaughter of steers has remained fairly similar over the last five years as outlined in **Table 1**.

While it is encouraging that a third of steers were fit for slaughter under 24 months during 2019 the proportion has declined from previous years.

Price reporting data allows us to look at the slaughter age of prime cattle in more detail. During 2019 34 per cent of steers killed in price reporting plants were under 24 months of age. In 2017 41 per cent of steers were under 24 months at point of slaughter while 37 per cent were under this age limit during 2018.

During 2019 a further 55 per cent of the steer kill were aged between 24 and 30 months which is up slightly from previous years. Overall the proportion of price reported steers meeting the under 30 month criteria was 89 per

cent during 2019. This is back from 91 per cent in 2018 and 93 per cent in 2017.

Heifers

The average age at slaughter of heifers during 2019 was also 25.4 months, up marginally from the previous year. The average age at slaughter of heifers has been in and around 25 months over the last five years as outlined in **Table 2**.

However while the average age at slaughter has held fairly stable there has been a decline in the proportion of heifers that were slaughtered under 24 months. During 2019 36 per cent of price reported heifers were under 24 months at point of slaughter, back from 39 per cent in 2018 and 43 per cent in 2017. The proportion of heifers killed between 24 and 30 months of age has increased to 55 per cent of the price reported kill during 2019.

This puts the proportion of heifers killed under the 30 month age limit at 87 per cent during 2019.

Over 30 month heifers

2017: 11 per cent
2018: 12 per cent
2019: 13 per cent

Young bulls

The average age at slaughter of young bulls during 2019 was 15.5 months, unchanged from the previous year as shown in **Table 3**. It has however increased slightly from the 14.8 months recorded in 2015 and 2016. During 2019 79 per cent of young bulls killed in price reported plants were under 16

month age limit, which again was unchanged from the previous year.

As outlined earlier beef from young bulls that do not meet the under 16 month age requirement have much more limited market outlets. While some processors will accept overage young bulls it is important that producers contact the procurement staff of individual plants before going down this production route.

Current penalties

Quoted penalties for over age steers and heifers vary across plants but generally range from 10-20p/kg. Penalties for overage young bulls are in the region of 20-50p/kg with some plants not killing overage young bulls. The application of any penalties applied is at the discretion of the processor.

Age at slaughter

There are a range of factors that influence the age at slaughter of prime cattle including genetics, farming system, animal performance, weather and market returns however it is important that producers aim to finish cattle as efficiently as possible.

Age at slaughter is a good indication of efficiency for the beef sector as a whole and there is notable variation in age at slaughter across farms. With a growing emphasis on climate change and sustainability it is important to focus on all aspects of technical efficiency on the farm and get animals ready for slaughter as timely and cost effectively as possible.

Table 1: Breakdown of steers by age at slaughter 2015-2019.

Source: LMC Price Reporting

Year	% Under 24 months	% 24-30 months	% Over 30 months	Average (months)
2015	35%	54%	11%	25.2
2016	39%	53%	8%	25.0
2017	41%	51%	7%	24.9
2018	37%	54%	9%	25.3
2019	34%	55%	11%	25.4

Table 2: Breakdown of heifers by age at slaughter 2015-2019.

Source: LMC Price Reporting

Year	% Under 24 months	% 24-30 months	% Over 30 months	Average (months)
2015	40%	48%	12%	25.4
2016	42%	47%	11%	24.9
2017	43%	47%	11%	24.6
2018	39%	49%	12%	25.1
2019	36%	51%	13%	25.1

Table 3: Breakdown of young bulls by age at slaughter 2015-2019.

Source: LMC Price Reporting

Year	% Under 16 months	% 16-24 months	% Over 24 months	Average (months)
2015	90%	9%	1%	14.8
2016	89%	10%	0%	14.8
2017	84%	15%	1%	15.2
2018	79%	20%	1%	15.5
2019	79%	20%	1%	15.5

STRONG CORRELATION BETWEEN WEIGHT AND AGE AT SLAUGHTER

As outlined in the article above there is significant variation in the average age at slaughter of prime cattle across farms in Northern Ireland. While there are a number of factors that contribute to the age at slaughter perhaps the most important factor that influences a

producers management decisions is the expected or target carcass weight.

As outlined in **Figure 1** there was a strong positive correlation between age at slaughter and average carcass weight of steers killed in Northern

Ireland during 2019. A steer with a higher carcass weight signifies a higher return to the producer however this increased value does not necessarily indicate efficiency or profitability when there is an increase in age at slaughter.

The average carcass weight of steers killed in Northern Ireland at 24 months of age during 2019 was 360kg while the average carcass weight of steers killed at 30 months of age was 370kg as outlined in **Table 4**.

Assuming a kill out percentage of 55 per cent the liveweight of steers killed at 24 months was 655kg while the steers killed at 30 months had an estimated liveweight of 673kg. This increase by 18kg was achieved during the additional 182 days the animals were on farm.

If we use an R3 steer price of 340p/kg as an indicator the value of the steers killed at 24 months was £1,224 while

the value of steers killed at 30 months was £1,258. This equates to an additional £34 in the value of the finished animal.

Assuming a birth weight of 45kg the daily liveweight gain of the steers killed at 24 months was 0.84kg/kg while the daily liveweight gain of the steers killed at 30 months was 0.69kg/day.

There is huge variability in the costs of production between systems and between farms when finishing beef cattle which will impact the age at slaughter. The purpose of this article is to encourage producers to look at their age at slaughter and identify an efficient production system that suits their individual farm.

Figure 1: Age and carcass weight of steers killed in Northern Ireland during 2019.
Source: LMC price reporting

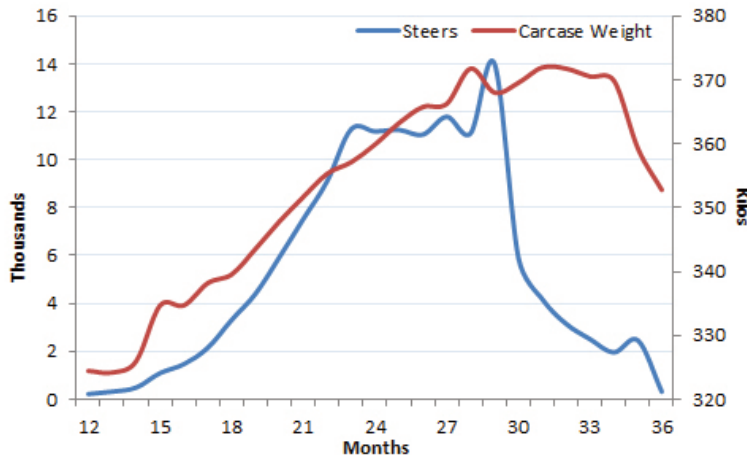


Table 4: Performance of steers killed at 24 months and 30 months in Northern Ireland during 2019

Steers	24 months	30 months	Differential
Average carcass weight	360kg	370kg	+10kg
Liveweight (@55% killout)	655kg	673kg	+18kg
Age at slaughter (days)	730	912	+182 days
R3 steer price	340p/kg	340p/kg	no change
Value of carcass (£)	£1,224	£1,258	+£34
Daily Liveweight gain (birth weight 45kg)	0.84kg/day	0.69kg/day	-0.15kg/day

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@lmcni.com
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CATTLE TRADE

NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 10/02/20	Next Week 17/02/20
Prime		
U-3	324 - 334p	324 - 334p
R-3	318 - 328p	318 - 328p
O+3	312 - 322p	312 - 322p
P+3	264 - 276p	264 - 276p
	Including bonus where applicable	
Cows		
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

Base quotes from the major NI beef processing plants continued to hold steady this week with quotes for in spec U-3 steers and heifers ranging from 324-334p/kg. Most of the plants are quoting at the upper end of this range and producers are encouraged to shop around to get the best deal for their cattle. Quotes for O+3 grading cows also remained steady at 240-250p/kg with similar quotes expected next week.

Prime cattle throughput in local plants last week totalled 7,185 head. This was up 109 head from the previous week and just ahead of the 7,048 head killed locally during the same week last year. Cow throughput in NI last week totalled 2,137 head, up 123 cows from the previous week and 205 above the 1,932 cows reported in the same week in 2019.

Imports of cattle for direct slaughter from ROI last week consisted of 208 prime cattle and 106 cows. A further eight prime cattle and 112 cows were imported from GB for direct slaughter in local plants. Exports of cattle from NI to ROI for direct slaughter last week included three steers and 44 cows while no cattle were exported to GB for direct slaughter.

The average NI steer price last week came back by almost a penny to 332.3p/kg while the R3 steer price was up by 1.4p/kg to 341.4p/kg. In the corresponding week in 2019 the R3 steer price was 349.1p/kg. The average heifer price in NI last week decreased by 1.3p/kg to 335.1p/kg when compared to the previous week with the R3 heifer price remaining steady at 342.4p/kg. In the same week in 2019 the R3 heifer price was 351p/kg. The average price for young bulls last week increased by 1.6p/kg to 316.5p/kg with the R3 young bull price increasing by half a penny to 326.4p/kg. The average cow price in NI last week reported a slight increase to 238.7p/kg with the O3 cow price up by 3.3p/kg to 258.1p/kg.

The average GB steer price increased by 0.8p/kg to 333.5p/kg last week while the R3 steer price was back by the same margin to 340.4p/kg. R3 steer prices recorded increases in Southern England (+ 2.4p/kg), Northern England (+1.8p/kg) and the Midlands (+1.5p/kg) last week while the R3 steer price decreased in Scotland by 6.5p/kg. The average heifer price in GB increased by 1.6p/kg to 335p/kg last week while the R3 heifer price increased slightly to 340.1p/kg. The R3 heifer price recorded increases in both the Midlands (+2.9p/kg) and Northern England (+1.3p/kg) with the R3 heifer price back by half a penny in both Southern England and Scotland. In GB last week the average cow price was up by 0.4p/kg to 230.5p/kg with the O3 cow price up slightly to 252.2p/kg. This puts it 5.9p/kg below the O3 cow price in NI.

In ROI last week deadweight cattle prices improved across all of the grades. The ROI R3 steer price increased by 2.4p/kg to the equivalent of 311.8p/kg, this is 29.6p/kg below the NI R3 steer price. The R3 heifer price was up by 3.1p/kg to the equivalent of 316.9p/kg this is 25.5p/kg below the NI R3 heifer price last week. The O3 cow price in GB increased by the equivalent of 3.6p/kg last week to 245.6p/kg, 12.5p/kg below the same price in NI.

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

W/E 08/02/20	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	340.4	319.5	347.9	343.1	341.0	344.2
	R3	341.4	311.8	346.7	343.0	338.4	340.4
	R4	339.0	313.7	349.4	347.5	337.6	345.2
	AVG	330.1	297.3	331.4	317.7	316.8	312.7
Heifers	U3	345.9	327.6	355.3	344.0	349.4	349.4
	R3	342.4	316.9	348.5	342.7	339.1	340.1
	R4	340.2	316.7	349.8	342.2	339.8	343.6
	AVG	333.7	302.4	329.2	316.5	310.4	315.6
Young Bulls	U3	327.5	300.9	335.5	326.6	335.2	333.0
	R3	326.4	291.3	334.7	322.8	326.1	325.5
	O3	312.3	278.8	305.9	302.4	297.3	301.4
	AVG	316.5	-	322.9	308.9	313.1	292.0
Prime Cattle Price Reported	6,134	-	7,288	6,917	8,082	4,791	27,078
Cows	O3	258.1	245.6	254.2	254.6	252.2	252.2
	O4	261.9	246.3	254.9	254.9	252.2	251.4
	P2	220.9	223.2	208.7	210.8	205.5	207.4
	P3	239.5	237.2	227.4	225.2	227.3	226.9
AVG	238.7	-	250.3	237.5	226.8	222.9	230.5

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro= 84.73p 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 08/02/20	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	339.8	345.9	327.5
R3	338.0	341.0	326.4
O+3	329.3	332.9	318.0

*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 08/02/20	Weight Bands			
	<220kg	220-250kg	250-280kg	>280kg
P1	151.9	166.9	179.8	187.1
P2	175.7	194.2	222.4	233.8
P3	199.2	217.2	235.9	241.9
O3	-	231.8	246.4	259.4
O4	-	235.0	255.8	262.2
R3	-	-	-	278.3

LATEST LIVEWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 08/02/20	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
Finished Cattle (p/kg)						
Steers	203	214	207	170	201	190
Friesians	168	180	174	139	156	148
Heifers	203	210	208	165	198	182
Beef Cows	148	197	158	120	147	130
Dairy Cows	110	125	115	70	109	92
Store Cattle (p/kg)						
Bullocks up to 400kg	220	257	235	190	219	212
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	210	241	225	180	209	195
Bullocks over 500kg	200	214	208	165	199	185
Heifers up to 450kg	215	260	235	170	214	192
Heifers over 450kg	200	220	210	170	199	185
Dropped Calves (£/head)						
Continental Bulls	320	435	370	200	315	250
Continental Heifers	220	340	260	110	215	160
Friesian Bulls	100	170	130	40	90	65
Holstein Bulls	60	90	75	10	55	35

SHEEP TRADE

NI SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 10/02/20	Next Week 17/02/20
Hoggets up to 22kgs	440-445p	445-455p

REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 25/01/20	W/E 01/02/20	W/E 08/02/20
NI L/W Hoggets	413.5	412.5	416.9
NI D/W Hoggets	431.2	435.0	436.9
GB D/W Hoggets	463.4	471.0	496.6
ROI D/W	439.1	431.0	446.5

Deadweight Sheep Trade

Quotes for R3 grading hoggets from the major NI processing plants improved at the beginning of the week, ranging from 440-445p/kg up to 22kg. Quotes for early next week are continuing to improve with quotes of 445-455p/kg up to 22kg expected. Hogget throughput totalled 6,484 head last week, back 10 per cent from the previous week. Exports of sheep to ROI for direct slaughter last week included 6,904 hoggets, up 375 head from the 6,529 exported during the previous week. The deadweight hogget price in NI improved for the fifth consecutive week to 436.9p/kg last week. In the same week in 2019 the deadweight hogget price in NI was 437.6p/kg. In ROI the hogget price increased by the equivalent of 15.5p/kg to 446.5p/kg last week.

This week's marts

Poor weather conditions mid-week contributed to smaller numbers of hoggets passing through the marts this week, with trade continuing to remain firm. On Monday in Massereene 609 hoggets sold from 415-466p/kg compared to 726 hoggets last week selling from 410-454p/kg. In Saintfield this week 431 hoggets sold from 409-450p/kg compared to 620 hoggets last week selling from 400-440p/kg. On Wednesday in Ballymena 902 hoggets sold from 400-457p/kg (avg 420p/kg) compared to 1,410 hoggets last week selling from 385-464p/kg (avg 410p/kg). In Enniskillen this week 352 hoggets sold from 408-466p/kg compared to 689 hoggets last week selling from 400-453p/kg. Top reported prices for good quality cull ewes ranged from £107 - £132.

LATEST SHEEP MARTS (P/KG LW)

From: 07/02/20		Hoggets			
To: 13/02/20		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	145	383	474	-
Saturday	Swatragh	555	385	434	-
	Omagh	776	432	457	-
Monday	Massereene	609	415	466	-
	Kilrea	300	404	424	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	431	409	450	-
Wednesday	Ballymena	902	400	457	420
	Enniskillen	352	408	466	-
	Armoy	412	408	465	-
	Markethill	850	400	451	-

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