

MEETING MARKET SPECIFICATIONS FOR BEEF

Prime cattle producers in Northern Ireland are continually being encouraged to produce cattle that meet current market specifications. Beef from cattle that fulfil these requirements can be used to service the widest range of customer orders from both the retail and food service sectors. This will help maximise returns for producers and provide the best returns for our high quality NI beef throughout the whole beef supply chain.

The current market specifications for prime cattle are outlined in **Figure 1** and the proportion of price reported steers and heifers that met these requirements during the period July to September 2020 (quarter 3).

Weight requirements

The current market specification for carcass weight is 280-380kg for both steers and heifers. While there are customers that will accept beef from carcasses outside this weight range carcasses within this range fulfil the widest range of orders. Based on price reporting information, 59 per cent of steers and 76 per cent of heifers fulfilled the carcass weight specifications during quarter 3 2020. This was a slight improvement from the corresponding period in 2019 when 57 per cent of steers and 75 per cent of heifers met the market specification for carcass weight.

Age requirements

Currently the market specifications require steers and heifers to be under 30 months of age. In the third quarter of 2020 88 per cent of steers and 87 per cent of heifers met this specification which was similar to year earlier levels.

Number of farm residences

Another requirement that should be met by prime cattle producers is that cattle should have resided on four or less farms over the course of their lifetime. If cattle have resided on more than four farms, significant penalties may be applied and therefore lower the return for the producer. During quarter 3 2020 98 per cent of both steers and heifers met this requirement. The proportion of steers and heifers meeting the requirement in the third quarter of 2020 was unchanged from the same period in 2019.

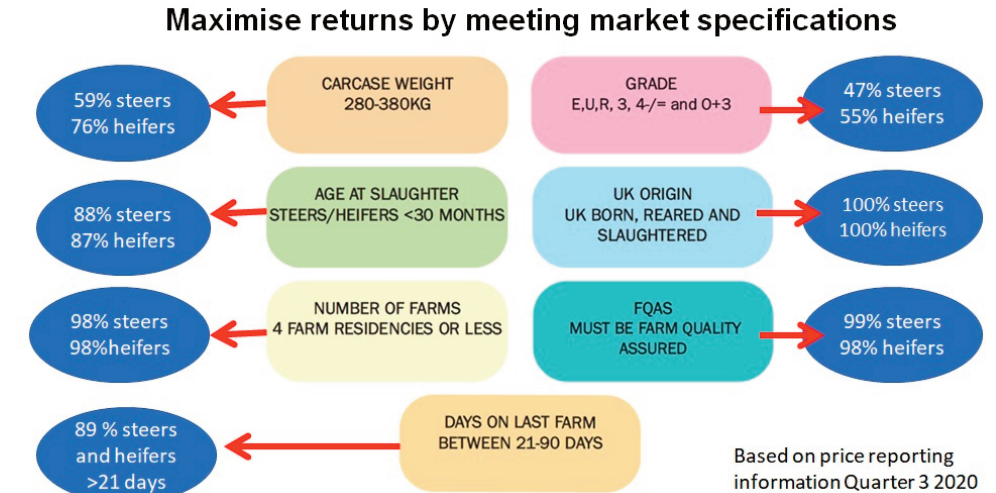
Days on last farm

Steers and heifers are also required to meet a minimum length of time which they were situated on the last farm before slaughter. Currently this requirement is dependent on the specific processor and varies from 21-90 days. In the third quarter of 2020 89 per cent of steers and heifers killed in local plants resided on the last farm for more than 21 days. This was a slight decrease from the same quarter in 2019 when 92 per cent of prime cattle fulfilled this requirement.

Grade

Another important aspect of current specifications is for producers to present prime cattle for slaughter that meet in spec grades and this will help ensure maximum return to the producer. The processors currently want prime cattle that achieve E, U and R grades along with fat class 3 and fat class 4-/= as well as O grades with fat class 3+. In quarter 3 of 2020 47 per cent of steers and 55 per cent of heifers achieved these grades. Beef from cattle that meet these grades fulfil the widest range of customer specifications however, it is

Figure 1: Current market specifications for prime cattle and how cattle met these requirements during July to September 2020 (Quarter 3). Source: LMC Deadweight Cattle Price Reporting



worth noting there are market outlets for cattle outside this range. This is particularly true for breed specific orders such as Hereford and Aberdeen Angus which will have a large proportion of O= and O- grading cattle in their slaughter mix.

UK origin

Many of the larger NI processors service customers who want beef from cattle that have been born, reared and slaughtered in the UK and during the third quarter of 2020 100 per cent of price reported steers and heifers met this requirement. Cattle that the processors import for direct slaughter do not need to be price reported. Cattle that are imported into NI for further

production are classed as NOMADs due to their mixed origin status and tend to be killed in some of the smaller processing plants who are not currently required to price report.

FQAS status

Farm Quality Assurance status at point of slaughter is a key requirement of many customer orders for beef and as a result some of the major processors refusing to handle non-FQAS cattle. The largest majority of prime cattle however fulfil this requirement with 99 per cent of steers and 98 per cent of heifers having FQAS status at point of slaughter during quarter 3 2020. This was similar to year earlier levels.

BREXIT: A NEW ERA FOR AGRI-FOOD

The 01 January 2021 marks a new era for trading relationships across these islands, with the Brexit transition period coming to an end, and the UK outside of the EU single market and customs union.

We all know significant change is happening, but what will it actually mean for farmers, and for agri-food businesses that trade across Ireland and into Great Britain?

To help answer that question LMC joined up with the Irish Farmers Journal and the Andersons Centre last week to deliver a webinar event to over 160 of our stakeholders. Michael Haverty, a partner and senior research consultant with Andersons presented at the event.

Michael is well-recognised as a leading expert, having produced a number of reports on Brexit for top UK businesses. His analysis has also been sought by various Westminster committees over the past few months.



THE
ANDERSONS
CENTRE



The webinar started with a brief look at the financial health of the farming industry across the UK, before considering the current state of trade negotiations between the UK and EU. However, the main focus was on the future trading relationships, whether it is across the Irish border, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, or between the UK and EU27 (including the Republic of Ireland).

As well as potential tariffs if there is no UK/EU trade deal done in the months ahead, there are also new trading rules that will have implications for how we do business in the future. But the UK is not just negotiating with the EU, so the webinar considered what impact trade deals with non-EU countries might have

on our agri-food industry. Bringing all these issues together, the analysis concluded with a look at what impact it could all have at farm level.

This event was originally planned for the spring of 2020, but had to be postponed due to COVID-19. Previous events have proved very popular with attendees, and we have consistently received excellent feedback on the quality of the information presented.

All attendees at the event will have received a copy of the slides via email. If you would like access to the slides please contact LMC by email at bulletin@lmcni.com.

MORE NI LAMBS PROCESSED LOCALLY

Last week 9,636 lambs passed through processing plants in NI which takes total throughput for the last six weeks to 61,255 head. These lambs accounted for 60 per cent of total lamb output from the NI sheep flock during this period.

In the corresponding six week period last year 57,048 lambs were processed in local plants and these accounted for 54 per cent of total lamb output from the NI sheep flock.

This increase in the proportion of lambs killed locally has meant less lambs have been exported to ROI for direct slaughter. During the last six weeks 40,678 lambs have made the journey to processing plants in ROI and accounted for 40 per cent of total output. In the same period last year 47,929 lambs were exported to ROI for direct slaughter and these accounted for 46 per cent of total output.

Figure 2: There has been an increase in the proportion of NI lambs processed locally in six weeks ending 26 September 2020. Source: DAERA



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
Tel: 028 9263 3000

WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS

CATTLE TRADE

NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 28/09/20	Next Week 05/10/20
Prime		
U-3	350 - 358p	354 - 360p
R-3	344 - 352p	348 - 354p
O+3	338 - 346p	342 - 348p
P+3	288 - 300p	292 - 302p
	Including bonus where applicable	
Cows		
O+3 & better	258 - 270p	260 - 270p
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 NI deadweight cattle trade firmed as the week progressed with base quotes for in spec U-3 grade prime cattle ending this week ranging from 354-360p/kg. With the range of quotes available producers are encouraged to shop around to get the best possible deal. Quotes for O+3 grading cows also improved ending this week ranging from 260-270p/kg. Similar quotes are expected next week for all types of cattle.

Prime cattle throughput last week totalled 6,849 head, a decrease of 113 head when compared to the previous week. Cow throughput in NI last week totalled 2,225 head, back slightly from the previous week. In the corresponding week last year 7,977 prime cattle were processed in NI plants along with 2,380 cows.

Cattle imports from ROI for direct slaughter increased last week to 540 prime cattle and 323 cows while imports from GB consisted of four steers and 15 cows. Meanwhile exports for direct slaughter from NI to ROI last week included six prime cattle and 80 cows with a further 46 prime cattle and 15 cows exported to GB for direct slaughter last week.

The NI deadweight prime cattle trade last week improved across the majority of grades when compared to the previous week. The average steer price in NI last week increased by just under 2p/kg to 356.8p/kg while the R3 steer price was up 1.7p/kg to 365.8p/kg. Meanwhile the average heifer price in NI last week was up just under 2p/kg to 359.6p/kg with the R3 heifer price up marginally to 365.9p/kg. The average young bull price in NI last week was up by 0.3p/kg to 342.7p/kg while the R3 young bull price was up by 4.4p/kg to 357.4p/kg. The deadweight cow trade in NI also strengthened last week from the previous week with the average cow price increasing by 2p/kg to 249.8p/kg and the O3 cow price up by 4.5p/kg to 277.9p/kg.

The average steer price in GB last week was back by a penny to 367.8p/kg when compared to the previous week. The R3 steer price was back by just over 2p/kg to 374.4p/kg. R3 steer prices were back in all regions except the Midlands and Wales where the R3 steer price held steady from the previous week. The average heifer price in GB last week was back by just over a penny to 367.8p/kg while the R3 heifer price was back by 2.2p/kg to 373.8p/kg. R3 heifer prices reported declines in all regions last week with the strongest decline of 2.7p/kg reported in Northern England. The GB average cow price held steady last week at 244.7p/kg with the O3 cow price back 0.4p/kg to 269.4p/kg. This is 8.5p/kg behind the O3 cow price in NI last week.

The R3 steer price in ROI last week decreased by 0.7p/kg to the equivalent of 333.8p/kg when compared to the previous week. The R3 heifer price in ROI decreased by 0.4p/kg to 336p/kg. Last week the ROI average O3 cow price increased by just over a penny to the equivalent of 272.6p/kg. This puts it at 5.3p/kg below the same price in NI. Meanwhile prime cattle throughput in ROI last week increased by 425 head to total 26,739 head with cow throughput decreasing by 194 head to total 6,359 cows.

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

	W/E 26/09/20	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	367.2	343.9	385.7	377.4	377.3	374.0	378.9
	R3	365.8	333.8	386.9	375.0	371.2	366.9	374.4
	R4	365.5	333.7	387.9	380.6	371.2	368.3	380.5
	O3	355.7	314.7	373.4	357.1	347.8	348.2	353.4
	AVG	356.8	-	383.0	368.8	360.7	358.4	367.8
Heifers	U3	371.7	346.8	392.6	383.1	382.4	376.8	384.1
	R3	365.9	336.0	385.3	374.2	372.5	367.9	373.8
	R4	363.9	335.9	387.4	377.0	373.9	367.7	379.1
	O3	356.6	322.7	366.4	359.7	348.2	344.6	351.3
	AVG	359.6	-	383.9	369.3	360.7	356.3	367.8
Young Bulls	U3	358.6	332.4	378.6	359.4	368.8	371.3	370.3
	R3	357.4	317.7	370.8	357.6	360.3	365.3	362.1
	O3	339.7	304.3	337.1	355.1	336.2	341.9	342.9
	AVG	342.7	-	366.3	352.7	353.0	353.2	355.3
Prime Cattle Price Reported	5,244	-	6,098	6,879	7,659	4,975	25,611	
Cows	O3	277.9	272.6	275.2	271.1	268.7	263.0	269.4
	O4	281.0	272.2	276.8	273.1	270.2	264.5	271.1
	P2	240.2	245.9	236.0	227.9	228.3	228.8	228.8
	P3	258.9	261.2	248.7	245.6	243.3	243.5	244.4
	AVG	249.8	-	265.9	251.6	239.0	234.8	244.7

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=91.56p 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 26/09/20	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	365.3	371.2	361.3
R3	361.2	365.2	358.3
O+3	353.1	354.2	347.7

*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 26/09/20	Weight Bands			
	<220kg	220-250kg	250-280kg	>280kg
P1	166.1	184.0	192.7	206.9
P2	190.4	213.7	239.3	249.5
P3	210.7	233.0	254.0	261.5
O3	230.0	249.5	270.8	278.7
O4	204.3	-	271.6	281.5
R3	-	-	-	292.5

LATEST LIVELWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 26/09/20	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
Finished Cattle (p/kg)						
Steers	222	239	226	195	221	210
Friesians	166	184	172	142	165	156
Heifers	212	234	220	195	211	200
Beef Cows	145	187	156	120	144	135
Dairy Cows	113	148	119	100	112	106
Store Cattle (p/kg)						
Bullocks up to 400kg	220	253	238	200	219	210
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	220	248	232	190	219	205
Bullocks over 500kg	220	240	228	185	219	200
Heifers up to 450kg	220	256	235	190	219	205
Heifers over 450kg	205	231	218	175	204	190
Dropped Calves (£/head)						
Continental Bulls	400	500	440	275	395	335
Continental Heifers	340	440	380	225	335	280
Friesian Bulls	200	300	235	120	195	150
Holstein Bulls	150	245	185	10	145	75

SHEEP TRADE

NI SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 28/09/20	Next Week 05/10/20
Lambs up to 21kg	430-440p	430-435p

REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 12/09/20	W/E 19/09/20	W/E 26/09/20
NI L/W Lambs	416.4	405.7	395.0
NI D/W Lambs	439.8	436.8	428.7
GB D/W Lambs	464.3	463.7	462.9
ROI D/W	467.1	461.7	450.6

Deadweight Sheep Trade

Quotes from the plants for R3 grading lambs ended this week ranging from 430-435p/kg with plants paying up to 21kg. Lamb throughput in local plants last week totalled 9,636 head back 431 lambs from the previous week. In the corresponding week in last year 8,563 lambs were processed locally. Lamb exports to ROI for direct slaughter last week totalled 6,475 head with 816 ewes and rams also exported. The deadweight lamb price in NI last week was back by just over 8p/kg from the previous week to 428.7p/kg. This is considerably ahead of the same week last year when the deadweight lamb price in NI was 346.2p/kg. In ROI last week the average lamb price was the equivalent of 450.6p/kg, back just over 11p/kg from the previous week.

Liveweight Sheep Trade

The marts have reported a slight improvement in trade this week compared to last week with good numbers of lambs passing through the marts. In Omagh last Saturday 1,210 lambs sold from 421-474p/kg compared to 921 lambs the previous Saturday selling from 423-480p/kg. In Massereene on Monday 1,206 fat lambs sold from 390-423p/kg compared to 926 fat lambs last week selling from 390-405p/kg. On Wednesday in Ballymena a large entry of 2,302 lambs sold from 385-418p/kg (avg 393p/kg) compared to 1,609 lambs last week selling from 380-415p/kg (avg 390p/kg). In Markethill this week 1,500 lambs sold from 400-452p/kg. Top reported prices for cull ewes ranged from £96-£133 across the marts this week.

LATEST SHEEP MARTS (P/KG LW)

From: 26/09/20		Lambs			
To: 01/10/20		No	From	To	Avg
Saturday	Omagh	1210	421	474	-
	Swatragh	1400	380	408	-
Monday	Massereene	1206	390	423	-
	Kilrea	470	387	421	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	444	382	500	-
	Rathfriland	704	382	480	415
Wednesday	Ballymena	2302	385	418	393
	Enniskillen	1060	390	429	-
	Armoyn	512	385	420	-
	Markethill	1500	400	452	-

Strict Covid - 19 restrictions are in place across all of the livestock marts

Information supplied by LMC / DAERA/ AHDB/ DAFM

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RECORD DEMAND FOR SCHOOL COOKERY DEMONSTRATIONS

The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) have been hosting beef and lamb cookery demonstrations in post-primary schools for the past three decades. And it really is a case of success building on success with the red meat support body already confirming a record demand from schools in 2020/21, just one month into the new academic year.

“Bookings opened at the beginning of September, and despite the changes to practical cookery in schools this year, we have seen encouraging demand for demonstrations”, explained LMC’s Education and Consumer Promotions’ Manager, Lauren Hyde. “This year we had a record number of demonstrations available and we are pleased to be able to provide 375 demonstrations between September 2020 and March 2021.”

She added: “Over half of the bookings were received within 24 hours of us launching the new schools’ campaign.

This represents a hugely encouraging uptake from all the teachers involved. A significant number of schools are not doing practical lessons at the present time, in order to avoid the mixing of pupils in classrooms.

Given this backdrop, LMC recognises that beef and lamb cookery demonstrations are more important than ever, so as to show pupils the skills and pass on ideas for practical cookery examinations. “LMC is proud to support teachers this year with resources such as posters, recipe books, lesson plans and work sheets available on line at www.food4life.org.uk,”

“Our resources support teachers teaching traceability, provenance and the benefits of the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme. They also profile beef and lamb as part of a healthy balanced diet and the critically important role of nutrition through the various stages of life.”

Food and Nutrition is a popular subject amongst pupils from GCSE right through to A Level. The cookery demonstrations allow us to make real contact with young people at a time when they are forming opinions on a range of important issues that will guide them for the rest of their lives.

Lauren Hyde again: “One of the most encouraging aspects to our work with the schools is the universal recognition that LMC has gained as a wholly impartial source of advice, where the inclusion of red meat in the diet is concerned. Obviously we will be building on this for the future.

“The cookery demonstrations are designed to show the versatility and convenience of beef and lamb as well as highlighting their importance within a balanced diet. LMC’s demonstrators can tailor demonstrations to meet the needs of different year groups, abilities and other requirements.

“The demonstrations are also intended to be fun and informative, with our demonstrators passing on useful nutritional information and cookery tips. At the end of the demonstration there is an opportunity for the pupils and, of course, their teacher to sample the dishes and ask questions.”

The first demonstration of the new academic year was hosted at Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Ballymoney on Tuesday, 29th September 2020.

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Image 1: Despite the impacts of Covid-19 LMC has seen a huge demand for our cookery demonstrations.



LMC LAUNCHING A NEW ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Image 2: LMC is launching a new advertising campaign during October 2020



LMC plans to launch a new advertising campaign later this month, focussing on the health and environmental messaging surrounding Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) beef and lamb.

Commission Education and Consumer Promotions’ Manager, Lauren Hyde, commented: “The campaign showcases our local NIFQA industry at a time where we must begin to lead the conversation and provide the scientific facts about red meat.

“While 91 per cent of local consumers eat meat on a regular basis, LMC recognises the growing demand from the public at large for more information on how beef and lamb are produced. We will also be highlighting the role of beef and lamb in a balanced diet, the critically important role of the Farm

Quality Assurance Scheme and the best ways to prepare and cook the various red meat cuts,”

Lauren further explained: “Some consumers are currently reconsidering their relationship with meat. This may be a conscious decision, as a consequence of their own decision-making processes. Alternatively, they may be unconsciously influenced by family members or through product advertising and the increasingly wider variety of food choices in retail outlets.

“Research carried out by LMC shows that meat lovers in Northern Ireland want to know more about provenance, the cut types, the benefits of different cuts and proper ways to prepare meat cuts. This large piece of work has taken substantial time and effort to get it to a stage that allows us to supply

independent, scientific information that consumers need, where red meat is concerned.”

According to Lauren, consumers are still enjoying nostalgic cuts such as the sirloin as a Saturday night treat and a silverside as the traditional Sunday roast. She said: “Although most local consumers remain meat eaters, some are feeling that meat consumption is being marginalised by non-meat eaters and would love to know the scientific facts about current topics such as health and environment.

“Consumers state that hearing information from experts would make them feel more empowered to stand up against anti meat messages being driven by the media. LMC research has confirmed that consumers want to hear a serious and authoritative message, where red meat in the diet is concerned.

Lauren concluded: “Covid-19 has not halted a year of hard work and research within LMC. Throughout the last couple of weeks, the final stages of a new LMC advertising campaign have been pulled together. “When looking at advertising now, we must be guided and informed by what the consumer wants and when it comes down to the issue of division between meat eaters and lapsed, we must get it right to ensure we are preventing lapsed becoming non-meat eaters.”

FQAS STANDARD IS WORKING TO REDUCE BVD PI RETENTION

Four months ago LMC informed farmers that the retention of animals identified as being Persistently Infected (PI) with Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) would result in suspension from the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS).

The implementation of this measure is having the desired effect with recently published figures confirming that, for June 2020, there were 277 retained PIs alive. This has reduced to 167 retained PIs at 1st September 2020. The complete eradication of BVD is a critically important objective for Northern Ireland’s cattle sector.

There are a number of benefits of BVD eradication including decreased costs of production due to the combination of lower calf mortality, a reduced need for the use of anti-microbials, an increased resilience to other diseases and improved cattle welfare. Timely testing is very important, as the prompt identification and removal of PI cattle is the key to disease control.

However, as LMC’s Industry Development Manager, Colin Smith, points out, there is still a lot of work required at all levels within the sector to ensure that the number of PI calves retained is brought down to zero. He added: “The new BVD standard was introduced to the NIBL FQAS scheme at the beginning of June this year and

aimed to drive down the number of retained PIs. This approach is obviously working with the latest figures clearly show that the steps taken are having an extremely positive impact. But there is more work to be done to eradicate this disease.”

“The cattle sector is playing its part and remains totally committed to the eradication of BVD however government must also play theirs by introducing stronger measures. These include the introduction of restrictions for herds that retain PIs, farmer notification of neighbours with PIs and a crackdown on herds with animals that have not been BVD tested.”

The new FQAS standard makes it a requirement that PI cattle are culled as soon as possible after being identified. These animals must also be isolated appropriately if they are present on farm at the time of inspection.

In order to rectify a BVD non-conformance, farmers have three options. They can e-mail confirmation that the retained PI animal is registered dead via APHIS online. Alternatively, they can confirm that the retained PI animal has moved in to the DEAD herd-made available by local DVOs via a ‘Move Out’ list - or they can provide evidence that the retained PI animal has retested BVD negative.



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