

SEVERAL FACTORS INFLUENCE GRADING SCORES OF PRIME CATTLE

DURING the six week period ending 17 February 2018 prime cattle throughput in NI totalled 42,407 head. This was a three per cent increase from the corresponding period in 2017 when 41,114 prime cattle were killed locally.

While prime cattle throughput has increased between the two periods there has been a slight shift recorded in the conformation scores achieved. Several factors contribute to the conformation scores achieved including the type of cattle being killed, carcass weights and the type of finishing system being used. Table 1 outlines the conformation scores awarded to the price reported steer kill in NI during the six week period ending 17 February 2018 and the same period in 2017.

During the 2018 period 18.8 per cent of steer carcasses were awarded a U grade, unchanged from the corresponding period in 2017. A further 36 per cent of steer carcasses achieved an R grade, a 1.5 percentage point decrease from the same period in 2017 when 37.5 per cent of steers achieved an R grade.

Meanwhile 35.3 per cent of steer carcasses achieved an O grade during the 2018 period, a 1.7 percentage point

increase from the same period in 2017. There was a marginal decrease in the proportion of P grading steer carcasses between the two periods.

One factor which will have contributed to the slight downward shift in the conformation scores achieved is the source of the cattle being killed. During the 2018 period dairy sired steers accounted for 15.2 per cent of the NI steer kill, up slightly from 14.7 per cent in the same period in 2017.

There was also an increase in the proportion of beef sired steers sourced from the dairy herd in the NI kill year on year. These beef cross steers accounted for 25.4 per cent of the total steer kill in the 2018 period, up from 23.7 per cent of the kill in the 2017 period.

Steer carcass weights increased slightly in NI between the two periods so this is unlikely to have been a factor in the slight downward shift in conformation scores. The average carcass weight of price reported steers was 354kg during the six weeks ending 17 February 2018, a slight increase from 352kg in the same period in 2017.

The average carcass weight of beef cross steers was 343kg, up 5kg from the same period in 2017. Meanwhile the average carcass weight of suckler

origin steers increased from 367kg in the 2017 period to 370kg in the 2018 period.

Table 2 outlines the conformation of the price reported heifer kill in NI during the six week period ending 17 February 2018 and the same period in 2017. As with the steer kill there has been a slight downward shift in the conformation scores achieved by the NI heifer kill year on year.

During the 2018 period 16.9 per cent of price reported heifers achieved a U grade. This was a marginal increase from the same period in 2017 when 16.5 per cent of heifers achieved a U grade. Meanwhile 45.2 per cent of price reported heifers achieved an R grade during the 2018 period, a 1.6 percentage point decline from the corresponding period in 2017 when 46.8 per cent of steers achieved an R grade.

O grading heifer carcasses accounted for 31.6 per cent of the price reported heifer kill in the 2018 period. This was

a 1.1 percentage point increase from the corresponding period in 2017. P grading heifers accounted for 6.1 per cent of the heifer kill in the 2018 period, unchanged from year earlier levels.

Table 1: Conformation scores achieved by the NI price reported steer kill during the six week period ending 17 February 2018 and the same period in 2017.

Kill Year	E	U	R	O	P
2017	0.4%	18.7%	37.5%	33.6%	9.8%
2018	0.3%	18.8%	36.0%	35.3%	9.6%

Table 2: Conformation scores achieved by the NI price reported heifer kill during the six week period ending 17 February 2018 and the same period in 2017.

Kill Year	E	U	R	O	P
2017	0.2%	16.5%	46.8%	30.5%	6.0%
2018	0.1%	16.9%	45.2%	31.6%	6.1%

There has also been a slight shift in the source of the NI heifer kill which will have contributed to the slight downward shift in conformation scores between the two periods. In the 2018 period beef sired heifers from the dairy herd accounted for 28.9 per cent of total heifer throughput. This was an increase

from 25.1 per cent of the heifer kill in the same period in 2017.

The average heifer carcass weight in NI during the 2018 period was 319kg, up from 317kg in the 2017 period. The average carcass weight of beef cross heifers increased from 303kg in the 2017 period to 304kg in the 2018

period. Meanwhile the average carcass weight of suckler origin steers increased from 326kg in the 2017 period to 329kg.

The grading of cattle to EU standards is the responsibility of factory operators, under supervision of DAERA. Whilst LMC has not graded cattle or sheep since 2011 regular analysis of the grading results is featured in the LMC Bulletin to help industry to better understand and interpret any changes in grading trends observed within the deadweight profile of livestock.

FQAS MART CLINICS MARCH 2018

LMC's Farm Liaison Officer, Terry White, runs Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) mart clinics at a range of Livestock Marts across Northern Ireland. Terry is present to assist members of FQAS with non-conformances, general scheme queries and any issues prior to or following an inspection.

Any farmers who wish to join the scheme can also do so through their local FQAS mart clinic. Terry will be available at the livestock marts listed above. For further information call (028) 9263 3024.



LOCATION	DAY	DATE
Omagh	Monday	05/03/2018
Saintfield	Wednesday	07/03/2018
Markethill	Tuesday	13/03/2018
Enniskillen	Thursday	15/03/2018
Kilrea	Wednesday	21/03/2018
Ballymena	Friday	23/03/2018

EU PUBLISHES DRAFT PROPOSAL ON BREXIT

EARLIER this week the European Commission published a draft withdrawal agreement outlining the conditions for the UK to leave the EU. One of the key recommendations outlined is that NI should remain a part of the single market and the customs union after Brexit.

The legal document incorporates the 'first phase' commitments agreed upon by the EU and the UK in December 2017 as well as the EU's position on the outstanding withdrawal issues and the UK's transition period. According to the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier, the Commission has released the draft text "for reasons of transparency" and "to foster a facts-based and realistic public debate on Brexit".

A key element of the draft document is a protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. This outlines that in the absence of any other alternative agreement prior to the UK leaving the EU that the "fall-back solution" would be applied to avoid a 'hard border' between the two regions. This proposal would maintain "those rules of the Union's internal market and the customs union"

that are needed to support North-South cooperation, the island's economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement.

This would effectively create a common regulatory area comprising the European Union and the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland and that will "constitute an area without internal borders in which the free movement of goods is ensured. This would involve an area in which the free movement of goods is ensured, covering customs, VAT, energy, agriculture, goods and other sectors, across the island of Ireland

Barnier highlighted that this is the only way to guarantee that the joint commitments of the EU and the UK will be upheld in all circumstances however the proposal was met with some resistance by the British Government. Theresa May said that the draft legal text the EU has published would, if implemented, undermine the UK common market and threaten the constitutional integrity of the UK by creating a customs and regulatory border down the Irish Sea, and no UK prime minister could ever agree to it.

