

NI SUCKLER HERD CONTINUES TO DECLINE

In June 2018 there were 255,900 suckler cows in Northern Ireland according to the DAERA Agricultural Census which was back four per cent or 11,200 head from June 2017 levels. This is the second consecutive year in which suckler cow numbers in Northern Ireland have recorded a decline and brings suckler cow numbers to their lowest recorded level since June 2014.

It is also worth noting that the number of beef heifers in calf has also come under pressure in the region with just 29,700 head on farms in June 2018. This was back 700 head from June 2017 levels and the lowest recorded number of beef heifers in calf on Northern Ireland farms since June 1986.

Suckler throughput in local processing plants between June 2018 and February 2019 was similar to the corresponding period in 2017/18. This steady offloading of cows combined with reduced heifer numbers will most likely result in a further decline in suckler cow numbers on NI farms in the June 2019 census.

The decline in the NI suckler cow herd has also been reflected in reduced calf registrations. Between July 2018 and February 2019 there were 224,235 beef sired calves registered to beef cows. This was back 15,644 head from the corresponding period in 2017/18 which accounts for a 6.5 per cent decline year on year.

While the Northern Ireland suckler herd

has recorded an overall decline in recent years the rate of decline has varied between counties as outlined in Figure 1 which shows suckler cow numbers in Northern Ireland broken down by county in 2008 and 2018. Over this period suckler cow numbers in Northern Ireland have declined by just under 10,000 head which equates to a four per cent decline.

Image 1: Suckler cow numbers in Northern Ireland are now at their lowest level since 2014



County Armagh with 31,108 suckler cows recorded on farms in June 2018, back 3,941 head or 11 per cent from June 2008 levels. A similar trend in County Londonderry has seen cow numbers decline by 2,936 head or nine per cent over the same period.

Suckler cow numbers have held relatively steady in County Antrim with 47,587 suckler cows recorded in the DAERA Agricultural census in June 2018. Meanwhile an increase of 1,198 suckler cows (+3 per cent) was recorded in County Down while an additional 2,024 suckler cows (+5 per cent) was recorded in County Fermanagh.

Suckler beef cows provide the backbone of beef production in Northern Ireland and this decline in numbers could have long term implications. It is therefore important that any support packages put in place post-Brexit reflects the needs of those farmers involved within the sector as well as supporting the needs of the wider beef industry and the rural economy.

While suckler cow numbers have recorded a decline over the last decade the number of dairy cows in Northern Ireland has increased by seven per cent to total 310,718 head in June 2018. This is an increase of 21,472 head from 2008 when there were 289,246 dairy cows in the region.

There has been an increase in dairy cow numbers in all six counties over

the last ten years with particularly strong increases recorded in counties Armagh, Down and Londonderry. Tyrone continues to have the largest dairy cow herd with 73,585 cows on farms in the county in June 2018, up six per cent from June 2008 levels.

While dairy cow numbers have increased over the longer term there has been some contraction in numbers in recent years. Dairy cow numbers recorded in the June 2018 Agricultural Census were back 5,100 head from June 2017 levels which accounts for a 1.6 per cent decline year on year. This is the second consecutive year in which dairy cow numbers have declined and brings dairy cow numbers back to June 2014 levels.

Dairy heifers in calf on farms in

Figure 1: Suckler cow numbers in Northern Ireland by county June 2008 and 2018
Source: DAERA



REVIEW OF FQAS MEMBERSHIP FEES

CURRENT fees for FQAS producer members are £55 + VAT for both annual renewal and joining the scheme. For the last number of years FQAS has been operating at a managed loss as historic FQAS reserves were utilised. This has enabled membership fees to be held at a constant level for seven years (since membership fees were last increased in April 2012).

However, these reserves are now depleted and although the scheme is run very efficiently, the FQAS Industry Board has decided that a modest membership fee increase must now be applied to allow the scheme to break even.

The new producer membership fees are to be implemented on **1 April 2019** to coincide with the new financial year, as agreed by the FQAS Industry Board. The initial registration fee (for new scheme

members) and annual renewal fee will both be **£60 + VAT**. In comparison to other equivalent Quality Assurance schemes within the UK, the proposed fee changes for 2019 still represent extremely good value for money, as most UK schemes have producer membership fees in excess of £100.



If you have any queries regarding the increase in renewal fees or would be interested in joining the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, please contact the Farm Liaison Officer at the LMC Helpline on 028 9263 3024 for advice or to request an application pack.

UK RELEASES TEMPORARY TARIFF SCHEDULE FOR NO-DEAL BREXIT

FOLLOWING the rejection of Theresa May's EU withdrawal deal by MP's for a second time this week there has been growing uncertainty about what form relationships between the UK and the EU will take after the end of this month.

While MP's also voted for no-deal to be taken off the table this scenario remains the default position in the absence of an extension to Brexit negotiations being agreed with the EU. An agreement to extend negotiations would delay the prospect of a no deal Brexit, but not prevent it altogether without UK and EU agreement on withdrawal terms.

Early this week the UK government released a temporary tariff schedule which outlines new agri-food tariffs and Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) for 'no deal' Brexit. Under this scenario the UK plans to suspend import duties on most agri-

food products. As outlined previously tariffs, and in some cases tariff rate quotas (TRQs) will be applied on sensitive agricultural products, including beef, butter, cheese, sugar, poultrymeat and sheepmeat.

However, the UK government has also stated that, in a bid to avoid breaching the Belfast Agreement which calls for the absence of border infrastructure between Ireland and Northern Ireland, it would not enforce any checks or tariffs on Irish cross-border trade.

There would however in all likelihood be checks and tariffs imposed by the EU on cross border trade from North to South under a no-deal scenario to protect the integrity of the Single Market. This would effectively give the EU tariff free access to the NI market and leave the Northern Ireland Beef and Sheep meat industry exposed to the devastating impacts of a no-deal Brexit

If the UK leaves the EU with no free trade agreement in place with the EU, WTO rules would compel the UK to apply its new tariffs to both EU and non-EU suppliers alike. For the most sensitive agricultural products, significant trade disruption is likely to arise from the application of tariffs to imports to the UK from the EU27. TRQs, where applied, are to be reserved either for traditional suppliers (e.g. New Zealand sheepmeat), or applied 'erga omnes', which would leave EU and non-EU suppliers competing for access to the UK market.

Brexit negotiations continue to be a very fluid and rapidly changing situation and at the time of print Theresa May has proposed bringing her deal back to MP's for a third time for a meaningful vote early next week. She has outlined that if this proves to be unsuccessful the alternative is a lengthy delay to Brexit to allow time for further negotiations.

WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS



CATTLE TRADE

NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 11/03/19	Next Week 18/03/19
Prime		
U-3	330 - 334p	324 - 334p
R-3	324 - 328p	318 - 328p
O+3	318 - 322p	312 - 322p
P+3	272 - 280p	266 - 280p
Including bonus where applicable		
Cows		
O+3 & better	222 - 245p	222 - 245p
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 cattle trade continued to come under some pressure this week with base quotes from the major NI processors for in spec U-3 grade prime cattle ranging from 330-334p/kg. Similar quotes are expected from most of the major plants next week although one plant has lowered its base quotes to 324-326p/kg. The trade for good quality O+3 grade cows ranged from 222-245p/kg across the plants this week. Similar quotes are expected for next week.

Prime cattle throughput in NI plants last week totalled 7,228 head, a decrease of 45 head from the previous week and 777 head more than the 6,451 prime cattle slaughtered in the corresponding week in 2018. Meanwhile a total of 1,587 cows were killed in NI plants last week, an increase of 96 cows from the previous week. This is 494 head below the 2,081 cows slaughtered in NI plants in the same week in 2018.

Prime cattle imports from ROI for direct slaughter in NI plants last week totalled 55 head, with 21 cows also imported for direct slaughter. In the corresponding week in 2018 there were 117 prime cattle and 32 cows imported from ROI for direct slaughter. Meanwhile 4 prime cattle and 49 cows were imported from GB last week compared to 18 prime cattle and 193 cows in the corresponding week in 2018. Exports from NI to ROI for direct slaughter included 14 prime cattle and 42 cows.

The NI deadweight trade for prime cattle last week continued to come under pressure with prices for the majority of grades back from the previous week. The average steer price was back 0.4p/kg to 333.7p/kg, while the R3 steer price was back by 1.4p/kg to 340.5p/kg when compared to the previous week. The average heifer price in NI last week decreased by 4.4p/kg to 333.7p/kg with the R3 heifer price back by 0.6p/kg to 342.5p/kg. The average young bull price in NI last week was back by 3.7p/kg to 310.9p/kg with the R3 young bull price back by 4.3p/kg to 325.3p/kg. The cow trade in NI generally firmed last week with the average reported cow price up by 3.6p/kg to 218p/kg while the O3 cow price decreased by 0.6p/kg to 233.7p/kg.

In GB last week the deadweight prime cattle trade also continued to come under pressure. The average steer price was back 3.9p/kg to 340.4p/kg while the average R3 steer price was back by 4.9p/kg to 346.2p/kg. The differential in R3 steer prices last week between NI and GB was 5.7p/kg or £20 on a 350kg carcass. The average heifer price in GB last week decreased by 4.1p/kg to 341p/kg while the average R3 heifer price was back by 3.4p/kg to 347.7p/kg. This puts the differential in R3 heifer prices last week between NI and the GB average at 5.2p/kg or £17 on a 320kg carcass.

In ROI last week the R3 steer price was back by 1.9p/kg to 315.5p/kg, putting it 25p/kg behind the R3 steer price in NI. Meanwhile the R3 heifer price came marginally back to the equivalent of 328.1p/kg which puts it 14.4p/kg below the corresponding price in NI. The O3 cow price in ROI last week recorded an increase of 1.7p/kg to the equivalent of 232.2p/kg, 1.5p/kg below the same price in NI.

Deadweight Sheep Trade

BASE quotes for R3 grade hoggets at the start of the week ranged from 420-430p/kg with local plants paying up to 22kg. Quotes expected for early next week are in the region of 410-420p/kg up to 22kg. The processors have reported an increase in the number of hoggets coming forward for slaughter with throughput last week totalling 4,131 head compared to 3,586 hoggets the previous week. In the corresponding week in 2018 hogget throughput totalled 6,149 head. Exports of hoggets to ROI for direct slaughter last week totalled 5,111 head, a decrease of 129 head from the previous week. The average deadweight hogget price in NI last week recorded an increase of 2.7p/kg to 427.2p/kg while the average deadweight hogget price in ROI last week increased by the equivalent of a penny to 426.4p/kg.

This week's marts

A CROSS the marts this week steady numbers of hoggets passed through the sale rings with the live trade coming under some pressure compared to last week. In Swatragh last Saturday 1,000 hoggets sold from 380-460p/kg compared to 530 hoggets the previous week selling from 390-470p/kg. In Massereene on Monday 903 hoggets sold from 370-420p/kg compared to 843 hoggets last week selling from 385-420p/kg. In Rathfriland on Tuesday 454 hoggets sold from 349-408p/kg (avg 376p/kg) compared to 300 hoggets last week selling from 380-466p/kg (avg 392p/kg). In Enniskillen on Wednesday 368 hoggets sold from 362-424p/kg compared to 695 hoggets last week selling from 368-417p/kg. Top reported prices for cull ewes ranged from £85-148.

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

W/E 09/03/19	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	341.4	322.6	351.8	350.9	347.8	349.7
	R3	340.5	315.5	350.7	349.5	344.8	346.2
	R4	338.7	317.2	353.5	363.9	344.8	353.4
	AVG	333.7	-	349.2	346.9	332.5	340.4
Heifers	U3	346.1	339.8	357.4	361.0	355.3	355.9
	R3	342.5	328.1	348.3	353.6	347.5	347.7
	R4	336.9	328.8	351.7	351.9	347.3	348.1
	AVG	333.7	-	348.8	345.5	336.5	341.0
Young Bulls	U3	323.9	302.0	343.0	332.1	331.0	334.4
	R3	325.3	293.5	338.2	330.0	325.5	329.4
	O3	308.6	277.7	301.2	297.3	305.3	303.8
	AVG	310.9	-	315.5	311.7	309.7	311.3
Prime Cattle Price Reported		6,517	-	7,170	7,046	7,430	26,466
Cows	O3	233.7	232.2	242.1	248.4	248.2	246.7
	O4	239.6	232.8	247.8	248.0	248.9	247.3
	P2	198.6	200.9	207.1	201.4	199.1	201.7
	P3	214.7	221.0	212.8	221.8	223.4	221.2
AVG	218.0	-	243.4	233.9	224.1	226.8	

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=85.98p 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 09/03/19	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	341.2	346.0	324.8
R3	337.2	339.9	325.5
O+3	328.0	331.0	317.1

*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 09/03/19	Wgt <220kg	Wgt 220- 250kg	Wgt 250- 280kg	Wgt >280kg
P1	135.9	147.5	159.0	166.0
P2	157.8	177.1	195.3	210.4
P3	180.0	198.2	211.2	216.6
O3	220.0	214.5	228.1	234.6
O4	180.0	211.3	236.0	240.0
R3	-	-	-	257.6

SHEEP TRADE

SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 11/03/19	Next Week 18/03/19
Hoggets > 22kg	420-430p	410-420p

REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 23/02/19	W/E 02/03/19	W/E 09/03/19
NI L/W Hoggets	399.2	401.2	394.1
NI D/W Hoggets	423.4	424.5	427.2
GB D/W Hoggets	419.7	415.5	417.0
ROI D/W	441.2	425.4	426.4

LATEST LIVELWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 09/03/19	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
Finished Cattle (p/kg)						
Steers	195	201	199	170	191	180
Friesians	162	163	162.5	135	155	143
Heifers	200	208	202	175	198	187
Beef Cows	140	182	161	115	139	127
Dairy Cows	107	135	114	70	105	87
Store Cattle (p/kg)						
Bullocks up to 400kg	215	250	233	195	214	205
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	210	238	224	190	209	200
Bullocks over 500kg	200	214	210	175	199	190
Heifers up to 450kg	225	272	240	200	224	212
Heifers over 450kg	200	215	207	170	199	182
Dropped Calves (£/head)						
Continental Bulls	325	430	345	225	320	270
Continental Heifers	300	380	330	170	295	225
Friesian Bulls	100	135	110	30	75	55
Holstein Bulls	65	100	85	2	60	30

LATEST SHEEP MARTS

From: 08/03/19		Hoggets (P/KG LW)			
To: 14/03/19		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	102	360	416	-
Saturday	Swatragh	1000	380	460	-
	Omagh	618	364	424	-
Monday	Massereene	903	370	420	-
	Kilrea	270	398	442	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	655	380	415	-
	Rathfriland	454	349	408	376
Wednesday	Ballymena	1032	360	440	375
	Enniskillen	368	362	424	-
	Armoyle	373	362	415	-
	Markethill	1080	370	415	-

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