

MORE HOGGETS FAILING TO MEET CARCASS WEIGHT SPECIFICATIONS

THERE has been a notable increase in the average carcass weight of hoggets slaughtered in NI in recent weeks when compared to previous years. Reports from the plants have indicated an increase in the proportion of the local hogget kill above the ideal 22kg carcass weight.

The average carcass weight of hoggets slaughtered in local plants has been over 23kg during the last two weeks

with an average hogget carcass weight of 22.9kg during 2019 to date. This is significantly higher than the corresponding period in 2018 when the average carcass weight of hoggets killed locally was 21.7kg. It is also notably higher than the average carcass weight recorded in previous years as outlined in Figure 1 which displays average carcass weights for the first 12 weeks of 2014 through to 2019.

The relatively mild weather this winter will have improved the performance of hoggets in Northern Ireland and contributed to the increase in average carcass weights. Reduced demand for heavier hoggets from the major processors in ROI will also have meant an increase in the proportion of heavier hoggets being slaughtered locally than may have been the case in previous years. Producers should handle hoggets regularly to assess slaughter fitness and aim to present hoggets for slaughter with carcass weights as close to 22kg as possible.

Figure 2: Producing heavy carcasses provides no financial return for the producer and reduces the average price paid per kg produced.

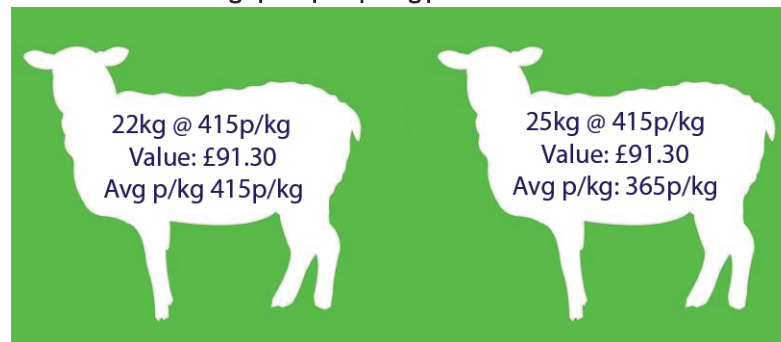
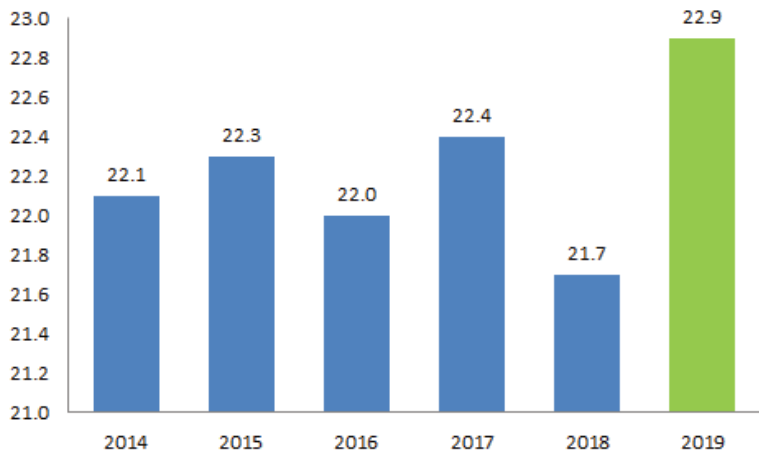


Figure 1: Average carcass weight of locally processed hoggets during the first 12 weeks of 2014-2019



Finishing hoggets heavier than the desired 22kg is inefficient for the individual farm business by increasing production costs and produces carcasses that do not meet the requirements of many major customer specifications. The major processors are currently applying an upper weight limit of 22kg and do not pay for any excess carcass weight beyond this. As outlined in Figure 2 producers are incurring the costs of producing these heavy carcasses with no financial return.

During 2019 to date overweight hoggets presented for slaughter by local

producers produced 115 tonnes of lamb which the producer was not paid for. This is the equivalent of approximately 5,250 hoggets with an average carcass weight of 22kg during the 12 week period.

While heavier out of spec hogget carcasses produce a higher meat yield than in-spec carcasses the overall value of the carcass to the processor is not necessarily any higher. Cuts from heavier carcasses are more difficult to sell and tend to be sold into lower value markets. These markets attract a much lower return per kg of carcass weight which reduces the overall value.

The major processing plants have a preference for R and U grading hoggets with a carcass weight of 18-22kg, a fat class 2 or 3 and that are Farm Quality Assured (FQ). Carcasses from hoggets that meet these criteria fulfil the widest range of customer specifications.

With penalties in place for hoggets not meeting this specification and an upper weight limit of 22kg it is important that producers aim to produce hoggets within these parameters. This will help improve the efficiency of their farming enterprise and also reduce costs of production by reducing feed intake, and lowering slaughter ages.

STRONG PRIME CATTLE THROUGHPUT IN LOCAL PLANTS

REPORTS from producers in recent weeks have indicated some delays in getting prime cattle killed in local plants. Meanwhile the processors have indicated strong supplies of prime cattle combined with weaker demand for beef as factors behind the delays

last week totalled 6,426 head which brings throughput for the year to date to 82,289 head. This is 2.2 per cent ahead of the 80,511 prime cattle killed in Northern Ireland during the same period last year.

The average carcass weight of prime cattle killed in Northern Ireland was 342kg during 2019 to date. This is an

increase of 6.7kg from the same period last year when the average carcass weight was 335.3kg. This increase in the average carcass weight combined with an increase in prime cattle throughput has resulted in 4.3 per cent more beef from prime cattle being processed locally during 2019 to date.

Prime cattle supplies for slaughter in Northern Ireland were relatively strong in the second half of 2018 and this has carried through into the first few months of 2019. APHIS figures have indicated similar numbers of cattle for beef production aged between 18-30 months on NI farms to previous years. This indicates that these relatively strong supplies of prime cattle for slaughter are expected to continue into the next quarter of the year.

As we move into the second half of 2019 prime cattle supplies for slaughter are expected to tighten as lower calf registrations over the last two years start to impact on cattle availability for slaughter.

REGISTER NOW FOR SPRING CONFERENCE

THE short and long term future for agriculture in Northern Ireland and across the UK, will be the subject of a conference taking place on **Thursday 11 April** organised by LMC in conjunction with IFJ and the Andersons Centre.

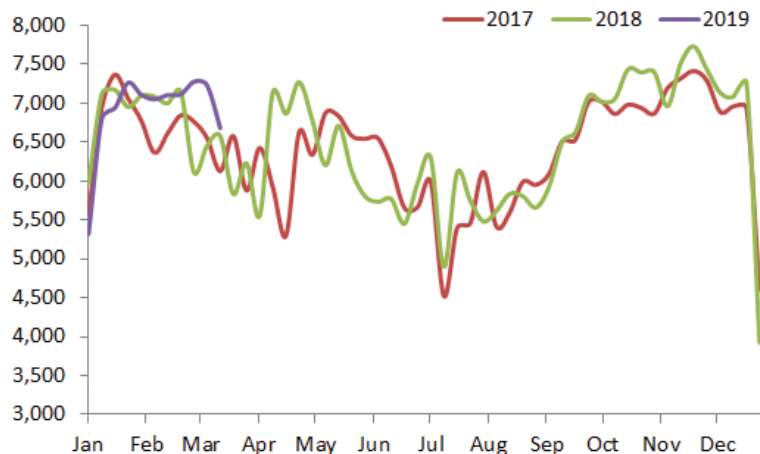
The conference will be delivered by experts from the Andersons Centre, and will cover the challenges and opportunities that exist across all the main farming sectors. In particular, the conference will consider issues the entire agri-food sector needs to tackle, whatever sort of Brexit emerges. The team at Andersons is recognised across

the UK and internationally as a leading provider of economic, policy and market analysis covering all aspects of agriculture. The event should be of interest to farm leaders, industry professionals and agri-food businesses in Northern Ireland or any business that trades into the UK.

The event takes place at the **Armagh City Hotel**, starting at 9am and running through to 12.30pm. Tickets are just £20 per person and all attendees will receive a pack with all the relevant conference content. Email events@farmersjournal.ie or call 0035314199578 to reserve a place.

Prime cattle throughput in local plants

Figure 3: Prime cattle throughput in NI processing plants 2017-2019



2019 Spring Conference

PROSPECTS FOR NI AND UK AGRICULTURE

Thursday 11 April - Limited places available

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CATTLE TRADE

NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 25/03/19	Next Week 01/04/19
Prime		
U-3	328 - 334p	328 - 334p
R-3	322 - 328p	322 - 328p
O+3	316 - 322p	316 - 322p
P+3	270 - 280p	270 - 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.

REPORTED NI CATTLE PRICES - P/KG

W/E 23/03/19	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	336.2	342.2	324.7
R3	333.9	336.5	327.7
O+3	325.5	327.8	317.7

*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 23/03/19	Wgt <220kg	Wgt 220-250kg	Wgt 250-280kg	Wgt >280kg
P1	133.9	150.8	153.8	167.3
P2	154.2	183.7	192.0	205.0
P3	174.2	194.2	211.7	217.3
O3	196.0	215.0	223.6	235.5
O4	-	210.5	235.0	239.3
R3	-	-	-	257.4

Deadweight Cattle Trade

BASE quotes from the major NI processors for U-3 grade steers and heifers this week ranged from 328-334p/kg with the majority of plants quoting 330-332p/kg for steers and heifers. The trade for cows has also remained steady with quotes for good quality O+3 grade cows in the region of 222-245p/kg across the plants.

Supplies of prime cattle for slaughter decreased last week to 6,426 head across the local plants. However this is up 595 head when compared to the same week in 2018 when prime cattle throughput was 5,831 head. Cow throughput in NI last week totalled 1,660 head and accounted for 20 per cent of total cattle throughput in local plants. This was similar to the same week last year when cow throughput in NI totalled 1,695 head.

Imports from ROI for direct slaughter last week consisted of 142 prime cattle and 17 cows, compared to 28 prime and 13 cows recorded in the corresponding week in 2018. Imports from GB last week for direct slaughter consisted of 10 steers and 24 cows compared to 1 heifer and 56 cows imported during the same week last year. Exports from NI for direct slaughter in ROI last week included 32 prime cattle, 88 cows and 11 bulls while no cattle were exported to GB for slaughter last week.

The average steer price in NI last week was back by 1.6p/kg to 329.8p/kg while the R3 steer price was back by 2.5p/kg to 337.6p/kg. The average NI heifer price last week was back by half a penny from the previous week to 332.6p/kg while the R3 heifer price decreased by 1.4p/kg to 338.3p/kg. Improvements were reported in the young bull trade with the average young bull price increasing by 1.6p/kg to 311p/kg with the R3 young bull price up by 3.2p/kg to 327.4p/kg. The average NI cow price reported a decrease of 1.1p/kg to 217.6p/kg with the O3 cow price back by 0.8p/kg to 234.3p/kg.

In GB last week prime cattle deadweight prices continued to come under some pressure. The average R3 steer price in GB was back by 1.6p/kg to 342.8p/kg with the average steer price decreasing by a penny to 335.9p/kg. A similar trend was reported in the deadweight heifer trade last week with the overall average heifer price and R3 heifer price both decreasing by a penny to 337.4p/kg and 343.2p/kg respectively. The cow trade in GB showed signs of firming with the overall average cow price up by 1.2p/kg to 225.7p/kg and the O3 cow price increasing by 1.5p/kg to 249.8p/kg, 15.5p/kg higher than the NI O3 cow price.

The deadweight cattle trade in ROI has held steady in euro terms and with a slight strengthening in euro against sterling this has resulted in a firming of the deadweight prices in sterling terms. The R3 steer price was up a penny to the equivalent of 317.1p/kg, compared to the previous week. The R3 heifer price held steady at the equivalent of 328.2p/kg last week. The cow trade was up by 1.8p/kg in ROI last week with an equivalent O3 cow price of 233p/kg.

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

W/E 23/03/19	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	337.1	323.7	347.8	350.8	345.6	347.4
	R3	337.6	317.1	345.3	351.6	339.9	342.8
	R4	336.1	316.4	349.5	353.8	339.4	346.4
	O3	329.0	302.5	325.0	325.4	314.3	320.1
	AVG	329.8	-	344.0	340.6	329.2	335.9
Heifers	U3	342.2	341.1	350.8	363.4	352.7	353.8
	R3	338.3	328.2	345.1	347.8	343.0	343.2
	R4	336.9	329.2	348.7	349.4	343.6	345.0
	O3	330.2	313.0	326.3	323.4	317.0	321.3
	AVG	332.6	-	344.8	342.9	333.6	337.4
Young Bulls	U3	323.3	301.8	336.7	333.1	336.4	336.1
	R3	327.4	294.2	331.4	325.5	325.7	327.0
	O3	311.0	277.2	303.3	305.4	292.8	298.8
	AVG	311.0	-	317.1	309.4	311.0	311.9
Prime Cattle Price Reported	5,734	-	6,235	6,917	7,473	4,784	25,409
Cows	O3	234.3	233.0	250.9	250.1	249.6	249.8
	O4	239.0	233.0	254.7	251.1	247.8	248.8
	P2	196.9	202.4	207.9	201.9	200.5	204.2
	P3	215.2	220.1	219.2	219.0	221.1	220.4
	AVG	217.6	-	248.0	232.1	220.3	225.7

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=86.01p 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

LATEST LIVEWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 23/03/19	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
Finished Cattle (p/kg)						
Steers	195	203	199	170	192	182
Friesians	141	152	146	125	140	133
Heifers	199	208	203	175	198	186
Beef Cows	135	176	145	112	134	123
Dairy Cows	103	116	110	70	102	85
Store Cattle (p/kg)						
Bullocks up to 400kg	230	279	250	210	229	218
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	210	231	222	180	209	195
Bullocks over 500kg	200	212	205	170	199	185
Heifers up to 450kg	220	249	235	190	219	205
Heifers over 450kg	200	212	205	170	199	185
Dropped Calves (£/head)						
Continental Bulls	300	365	330	200	290	245
Continental Heifers	235	355	290	140	220	185
Friesian Bulls	135	215	165	65	125	95
Holstein Bulls	100	125	112	2	95	50

SHEEP TRADE

SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 25/03/19	Next Week 01/04/19
Hoggets > 22kg	415-420p	420-440p

REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 09/03/19	W/E 16/03/19	W/E 23/03/19
NI L/W Hoggets	394.1	390.3	395.4
NI D/W Hoggets	427.2	421.0	417.9
GB D/W Hoggets	417.0	419.3	426.6
ROI D/W	426.4	422.1	423.8

Deadweight Sheep Trade

BASE quotes from the major processors for early next week have increased to 420-440p/kg for R3 grade hoggets up to 22kg with processors keen to source in-spec animals. A total of 4,450 hoggets were killed locally last week, back 12 per cent from the previous week when throughput totalled 5,064 head. Exports of hoggets to ROI last week for direct slaughter totalled 3,809 head, back from 5,378 head the previous week. A total of 73,003 hoggets have been exported to ROI for direct slaughter during 2019 to date, back 23 per cent on 2018 figures. The deadweight hogget price in NI last week was 417.9p/kg, back 3.1p/kg from the previous week. In ROI last week the reported deadweight price was the equivalent of 423.8p/kg, up 1.7p/kg from the previous week.

This week's marts

THE marts have continued to report smaller numbers of hoggets passing through the sale rings this week. In Omagh last Saturday 409 hoggets sold from 383-414p/kg compared to 208 hoggets the previous week selling from 369-421p/kg. In Kilrea on Monday 350 hoggets sold from 402-449p/kg compared to 450 hoggets last week selling from 394-424p/kg. In Rathfriland this week 165 hoggets sold to an average of 392p/kg compared to 282 hoggets last week selling to an average of 383p/kg. In Armoyle 244 hoggets sold from 390-444p/kg compared to 362 hoggets last week selling from 380-435p/kg. In Enniskillen on Wednesday 380 hoggets sold from 370-418p/kg compared to 380 hoggets last week selling from 368-402p/kg. The cull ewe trade remains firm with top reported prices ranging from £94-142 across the marts.

LATEST SHEEP MARTS

From: 23/03/19		Hoggets (P/KG LW)			
To: 28/03/19		No	From	To	Avg
Saturday	Swatragh	600	339	439	-
	Omagh	409	383	414	-
Monday	Massereene	536	390	424	-
	Kilrea	350	402	449	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	444	380	418	-
	Rathfriland	165	383	422	392
	Armoyle	244	390	444	-
Wednesday	Ballymena	775	370	455	390
	Enniskillen	380	370	418	-
	Markethill	700	390	450	-

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