



National Beef Association Newsletter

THE INFORMATION AND OPINION IN THIS NEWSLETTER IS DISTRIBUTED FOR THE USE OF NBA MEMBERS.

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NEWS AND

NBA DIRECTORS WEEKLY REPORT

The voluntary national elimination programme for BVD in England, will be launched on July 1, 2016.

At the BVD workshop in February the question was raised as to why farmers would see a need to join BVDFree. Any farm can eliminate BVD virus on its own and with good biosecurity could protect its status. In the long term a national elimination programme which reduced BVD virus prevalence would help reduce the risk of reintroduction of virus and some will see that as the value of BVDFree.

There is no excuse not to act – there is a wealth of knowledge of the virus, good diagnostic tests and other countries have shown that elimination schemes can work. All that is needed is the will – the will not just to start a programme but to keep the drive going until the vast majority of cattle in England are covered by the BVDFree Scheme.

The BVDFree Launch Implementation Group will be meeting next Wednesday (9th) to review progress and update the strategy and plans for launch. It would be good to know how you think the BVDFree is most likely to be successful in getting farms to join.

Congratulations to Northern Ireland where compulsory testing for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) virus in new-born calves came into effect on Tuesday, March 1st.

In Northern Ireland testing of all calves, including stillborns and abortions for BVD is now compulsory. The voluntary phase of the eradication programme began in 2013 using tissue sample-enabled tags for BVD virus to identify calves persistently infected (PI) with BVD virus to enable their rapid culling. Where PI calves are detected in a herd, further testing is required to identify any other PI cattle that may be present. It is envisaged that each herd will complete three years of tissue tag testing of calves followed by a further three years of lower intensity surveillance. As at the 29th February 2016 of 432,019 samples tested 0.50% were positive and 98.58% negative.

The Scheme is operated by industry through Animal Health and Welfare NI ([AHWNI](#)) with cross industry support from the meat and dairy sectors for this initiative, as well as others more directly involved in the process, such as tag suppliers and manufacturers. BVDFree will keep in touch with AHWNI to learn lessons and share experiences on how best to achieve our shared goal.

Refreshing TBEAG's membership is now underway. The advert is live on the Cabinet Office website at the link here: <https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/appointment/bovine-tb-eradication-advisory-group-england/>.

They're looking for a range of people who should be able to demonstrate a strong track record in one or more of the following fields or in a suitable equivalent to be detailed in the application form:

- The dairy and/or beef cattle industry in the High Risk Area
- The dairy and/or beef cattle industry in the Low Risk Area
- Veterinary practice relating to TB
- Animal health and veterinary science relating to TB
- Wider countryside expertise

- Consumer issues relating to the dairy/beef supply chain

The EFRA Farmgate Prices Report

The Efra report on Farmgate Prices has been published this week and within it there are a number of recommendations and conclusions all of which can be seen [here](#).

These recommendations include a suggestion that the Grocery Code Adjudicator should have their remit expanded to include the protection of suppliers, which is what the NBA has been working towards with our call for an Agricultural Ombudsman. Finally it seems that primary producers are being listened to.

The (EFRA) Committee has also this week warned that farmers in the UK are at risk of suffering further cash flow problems if the RPA does not commit to fixing ongoing issues with its IT systems, in its report on Farmgate prices.

Chair of the EFRA Committee Neil Parish, MP for Tiverton and Honiton, said: "The RPA introduced an IT system that wasn't fit for purpose and subsequent errors made in the attempt to fix the problem only caused further delays and confusion for applicants. We welcome the efforts being made to solve this problem and reduce delays but it is crucial that the RPA works to at least match the target achieved by the previous scheme of 90 percent of payments made by the end of December each year."

March Beef Recipe

The latest beef recipe from our resident chef, Philippe Wavrin, the Group Executive Chef for the privately owned Robert Parker Collection of hotels is on the website now. You can find it [here](#).

Beef farmers invited to roadshow events to discuss industry issues and trends

The National Beef Association (NBA) is heading out on a spring tour of marts across England to meet producers at store cattle and suckled calf sales.

The NBA Roadshow will be visiting six livestock markets between March and May, in a show of support for the important role marts play in the industry and to meet farmers to discuss current issues in the beef sector.

Representatives from the NBA will be attending spring sales at Carlisle in Cumbria, Hexham in Northumberland, Bakewell in Derbyshire, Ashford in Kent, Bishop's Castle in Shropshire and Newark in Nottinghamshire.

As the voice of the beef industry, the NBA has regional committees covering every part of the UK acting on behalf of members. Beef farmers attending the marts on NBA Roadshow days will be able to find out more about what the organisation is doing in their area as well as discuss the latest national trends in the industry.

NBA chief executive, Chris Mallon, said: "We are keen to support livestock marts and the key role they play in helping beef farmers obtain the best prices.

"Marts are independent arbitrators of prices and they act on the farmers' behalf to maximise stock value.

"We're looking forward to getting out on to the road to meet farmers face to face, find out what grassroots challenges they are facing and discuss how the NBA and the marts system can work together to boost the British beef sector."

The events will focus on engaging with farmers to discuss how they can tackle problems and find out how they can take advantage of current trends in the industry to improve their own businesses. The NBA has a wide-ranging remit to support and promote the sustainability of the British beef industry and at the heart of that is helping members to boost their profitability. In addition to events like the mart roadshows, it organises regular meetings, updates and farm visits where members can learn from each other and share best practice.

Marts are one of the key venues where farmers meet regularly, and the NBA is keen to encourage engagement, debate and the sharing of ideas alongside the social aspect that livestock markets provide.

David Pritchard from Borderway Mart in Carlisle, which will be hosting the NBA Roadshow on March 23 during the Spring Suckled Calf Sale, said: "We're pleased to be part of the NBA event, which will provide an added attraction for both vendors and buyers on sale day.

"We heartily support the partnership approach and will be working together with the Association to promote the beef industry, listen to farmers' thoughts and showcase the important role of livestock markets in helping to achieve the best prices."

The NBA Roadshow will be visiting:

- Bakewell – March 11
- Newark – March 19
- Carlisle – March 23
- Ashford – April 26
- Bishop's Castle – May 5
- Hexham – May 6

2016 NBA DIARY

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Tuesday 8th March | Pedigree Breeders Committee Meeting, Newton Rigg College |
| Thursday 10th March | EU Animal Health Regulation Core Group Meeting |
| Tuesday 15th March | NBA Board Meeting, Hexham |
| Friday 20th May | BEEF EXPO, Bakewell Market |
| Tuesday 14th June | Policy Meeting, Welshpool |
| Tuesday 21st June | Board Meeting, Harper Adams University |
| Tuesday 13th September | Board Meeting, Hexham |
| Tuesday 13th September | NBA AGM, Hexham |
| Tuesday 18th October | Policy Meeting, Cullumpton |
| Tuesday 6th December | Board Meeting, Hexham |

Entries in Red are open to all NBA Members

Entries in Green indicate Meetings attended by NBA representatives

Entries in Blue indicate NBA Committee Meetings



SBA NEWS

SBA is today asking Scottish Government to remove the uncertainty of when beef producers will receive their support payments. We estimate at the present rate of progress it will take until the end of June before all producers will receive their first instalment.

We are then told that LFASS and SSBSS calf payments will not start till all Basic payments are issued. As the budget for both these schemes already known why oh why can they not be issued in their historic payment window. This would certainly ease the financial stress on the whole beef supply sector and dare we say it, reduce the barrage of criticism presently aimed at the Cabinet Secretary and his officials.

Even if they are unable to pay out the above 2 payments it is high time for some good old fashioned honesty about actual realistic payment schedule. This would, at least, allow the industry to plan with their bankers for the level and duration of extra funding needed to tide our individual over.



NBA MARKET REPORT (written today at 4pm)

The finished cattle trade remains in the doldrums with slight moves down the way, there seems to be enough cattle available to maintain processor requirements as retail demand remains quiet. Worryingly for those selling dairy type stores many of the finishers specialising in this end of the market have seen such low returns that they are not refilling empty pens. The severe deductions experienced on the VIA grading system have seen many finishers change their preferred outlet as we have seen differences of £80 per head reported.

ROI cattle prices are now more or less level with NI and the gap between UK prices has reduced from a 60p gap to around 25p mainly due to the falling fortunes of sterling compared to the euro. ROI cattle had settled around 290p/kg for a long time but now ROI heifers are averaging close to 314p/kg ahead of NI and only 20p behind most of England.

For the week ended 27th February the deadweight prime cattle trade moved in the same direction as it has for a number of weeks and gently drifted down. Estimated at 30,700, almost 2,000 fewer cattle were processed, compared with the week earlier. Overall, the all prime price fell by another half a penny on the week to average 328.0p/kg.

The number of steers estimated to have been slaughtered was back 300 head on the week, while heifers coming forward fell 1,300 head. The average price of steers and heifers meeting R4L specification hardly moved on the week at 340.3p/kg and 339.2p/kg respectively.

Young bulls continue to average around 300p/kg. Prices for the latest week were up 3p at 301.1p/kg. As always the market for these types is heavily depended on finish and conformation.

The cow trade was stable on the week. While estimates suggest that the number coming forward was again ahead on the same week last year, the market absorbed them well and the -O4L cow average came back just a penny at 216.9p/kg. The cow trade seems to be demonstrating a better degree of robustness of late, most likely a reflection of sterling's movement against the euro restoring some impetus to the export trade.

The total number of cattle and calves in England as of December was up almost one per cent on the year at 5.36 million head, according to the latest statistics from DEFRA.

In recent years the breeding herd in England has been steadily falling, from just over 2.0 million in 2005 to a low of 1.84 million in December 2013. However, with the last two years bucking this trend, the breeding herd in December was reported to be almost 1.88 million head. Most of this growth can be attributed to an increase in the dairy herd which, despite the challenges, has still grown another 14,000 head this year to 1.16 million head. Combined with the increase in December last year, this now means that the dairy segment of the breeding herd has grown almost 56,000 head since December 2012.

The English suckler herd was reported to be up on the year in December for the first time since December 2010. At 700,000 head there was an increase of 4,000 on the year earlier. While this does indicate a more positive position than has been the case in recent years, with lack of profitability still a concern in the suckler beef sector, it is far too speculative to suggest

this marks a step change in the overall direction of travel of the suckler breeding herd in the longer term. Payments made under CAP could fall for many suckler beef producers, while the costs of meeting the requirements for support may well increase. In addition, fewer farmers may be able to access environmental stewardship payments. This will mean that suckler producers will have to rely even more on returns from the market for the future of their business. Given the fact that lack of profitability is still going to be an underlying issue, any notable expansion in the suckler herd does still seem fairly unlikely.

Looking at the number of male cattle on the ground, total numbers were up almost two per cent on the year. This supports the outlook for increased supplies in England later this year and into 2017. In particular as growth in male cattle numbers was entirely as a result of increase in the number of those under one year of age on the ground. In addition the number of females in this age bracket was also up on the year earlier.

In total there were 1.611 million cattle in Northern Ireland in December, according to the latest statistics released by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

This represents a three per cent increase on the previous year and reflects the trend set by the growing breeding herd. Increases in both beef and dairy cow numbers have had a knock-on effect on the number of other cattle on the ground for the second year in a row.

The number of beef cows in December 2015 was 261,000 head, up three per cent year on year. Cow numbers are broadly in keeping with year-end levels seen since support payments were decoupled in 2005. Over the last 10 years numbers have moved within a narrow range of between 250,000 and 275,000 head.

With higher calf registrations last year on the back of the bigger herds to no surprise there was an increase in the number of younger animals on the ground in December. Calf numbers under six months of age were up three per cent while those between six and 12 months of age were a notable 10 per cent up year on year. In addition, the number of cattle between one and two years of age was up three per cent. In contrast, there was an 11 per cent drop in cattle over two-years-of-age. Males of this age in the herd intended for slaughter were back eight per cent and females a significant 17 per cent.

What these developments mean for beef production is that, while prime cattle supplies will be tighter than in previous years in the early part of this year, they will undoubtedly improve as the year progresses and into 2017.

Prime cattle imports from ROI for direct slaughter in NI plants last week totalled 359 head, very similar to the 349 head imported the previous week however lower than the 519 prime cattle imported during the corresponding week in 2015. The number of cows imported from ROI for direct slaughter in NI plants totalled 47 head last week compared to 26 cows the previous week and 93 cows during the corresponding week in 2015. Meanwhile exports from NI to ROI for direct slaughter last week consisted of 37 prime cattle and 161 cows. This was fairly similar to the 80 prime cattle and 158 cows exported to ROI during the previous week. Exports from NI for direct slaughter in GB last week consisted of 52 prime cattle and 12 cows which is lower than the 175 prime cattle and 41 cows exported to GB the previous week.

The average R4L steer price in GB came back again and is averaging 340.3p/kg down a fraction -0.3p on the week, Scotland is at 342.4p/kg down 0.6p/kg, the South are averaging at 335.5p/kg up 1p/kg, the North is steady and averaged 345.3p/kg, the Midlands have an average of 334.4 down 0.7p/kg for the week. Northern Ireland steers are at 312.7p/kg down 1.4p/kg on the week and the ROI is up 4p/kg in sterling terms at 300p/kg.

The average R4L heifer price in GB is steady and averaged 339.2p/kg. The R4L heifer price in Scotland is down 0.2p/kg at 343.6p/kg, Midlands averaged 338p/kg a stand on position, the North is back 1.6p/kg on the week averaging 337.7p/kg, Southern England heifers are up 1.3p/kg and averaged 336.4p/kg. Northern Ireland heifers are back 3.1p/kg at 310.7p/kg and ROI heifers are up 3.9p/kg in sterling terms to average 313.8p/kg.

For the coming week:

In the South of England, we are seeing cattle being quoted from bases of 325p to 327p/kg.

While in the North, base prices quoted for next week are in the region of 339p/kg.

The Scottish price is not much different to the North of England, Scotland is seeing cattle being quoted from a base of 342p/kg. In Northern Ireland processor, prices quoted are around 306p/kg based on R4L for the coming week. Angus, Shorthorn and Hereford native bred cattle continue to attract premiums of depending on the scheme.

The Angus premium has fallen to around 5p in Scotland but varies depending on the scheme and the retailer involved, some schemes are still on a premium up to 30p.

Cows remain in the region of 235p, with more for better fleshed cows with good conformation.

AHDB (Meat Services) and LMC market prices: Week Ending 5/3/2016

Last Week's GB R4L steer average was 340.3p/kg . The overall cow average was 195.6p/kg

Auction Averages Week Ending 02/03/2016

| | Price p/kg lw | p/kg change on wk |
|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| STEERS | 178.5 | -0.9 |
| HEIFERS | 190.6 | -0.8 |
| YOUNG BULLS | 160.4 | -0.8 |
| COWS | 96.8 | +0.6 |

DeadWeight Cattle Prices (p/kg) Week ending 27/2/2016

| | GB | SOUTHERN | CENTRAL | NORTH | SCOTLAND | N. IRELAND | ROI |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| R4L Steer | 340.3 | 335.5 | 334.4 | 345.2 | 342.4 | 312.7 | 300.5 |
| p/kg change on wk | -0.4 | +1.0 | -0.7 | -0.1 | -0.6 | -1.4 | +4.0 |
| R4L Heifer | 339.2 | 336.4 | 338.0 | 337.7 | 343.6 | 310.7 | 313.8 |
| p/kg change on wk | -0.4 | +1.3 | 0 | -1.6 | -0.2 | -3.1 | +3.9 |
| R3 Bull | 323.8 | 317.8 | 328.5 | 316.8 | 330.0 | 303.4 | 286.8 |
| p/kg change on wk | +0.3 | -4.7 | +17.4 | -1.7 | -4.1 | 0 | +3.9 |
| O+3 Cow | 233.9 | 227.1 | 237.2 | 231.1 | 234.6 | 229.0 | 242.4 |
| p/kg change on wk | +2.6 | +4.2 | +4.3 | +0.5 | -0.4 | -0.7 | +5.1 |

All GB data in the above tables is reproduced from tables created by AHDB/LAA/IAAS – For more detailed information please visit www.laa.co.uk or www.eblex.org.uk.

* The above tables are unique because they are the only ones in existence that are published on a cross-UK basis that carry information on all UK regions plus the Republic of Ireland. The information, which is delivered free to NBA members by email, can only otherwise be obtained through AHD/LAA/IAAS (see above) and the Livestock and Meat Commission's (LMC) Bulletin for Northern Ireland. The tables should be a useful source of information to committed beef finishers across the UK.

BEEF INDUSTRY NEWS

THE NADIS PARASITE FORECAST FOR MARCH CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#).

PAC denounces CAP delivery programme as ‘an appalling Whitehall fiasco’

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has slammed the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) delivery programme as “an appalling Whitehall fiasco” owing to the inability of different agencies to work together.

The report, into the failures of a scheme to create an IT system to make payments to farmers, says that relationships between senior officials at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Rural Payments Agency and the Government Digital Service were “dysfunctional and inappropriate”, featuring “unacceptable” behaviour, and that the Cabinet Office did not intervene to stop the behaviour.

The system was initially planned to be digital only and to cost £155m to implement, but Defra had to switch to a paper-assisted system in March 2015, and by September 2015 the system had cost £215m.

PAC says that as a result of the failures of the programme farmers are being paid much later, with only 38% of farmers paid by 1 December 2015, compared to over 90% in previous years, and £200m payments under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme were delayed by 2 months.

Meg Hillier MP, chair of the PAC, said: “This Programme was set up to deliver support to UK farmers. Instead, it delivered an appalling Whitehall fiasco.

“It was frankly embarrassing to learn of senior and highly paid civil servants arguing to the detriment of hard-pressed farmers.”

The committee has called on Defra to set out clear targets on when it will pay farmers.

Disallowance penalties paid to the European Commission for delays in paying farmers are also set to reach 10% (£180m) a year, far above the 2% target.

A Defra spokesperson said: “The new CAP is widely acknowledged as the most complex ever and the task of setting up a new IT system to handle this additional complexity was a significant challenge. Throughout this period the collective focus has always remained on getting payments out to farmers as quickly as possible. In March 2015 there was a problem with one part of the online interface that enabled farmers to put data directly into Rural Payments, but the core of the system has always worked. Almost all farmers in England will be paid by the end of this month and the Rural Payments system has been further improved for 2016 to make it easier for farmers to apply for CAP payments.”

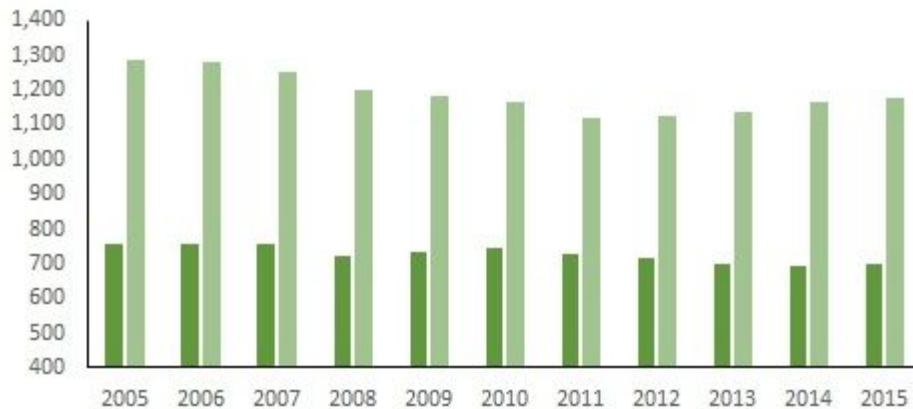
The National Audit Office has also criticised the lack of collaboration between the bodies responsible for the programme.

SMALL GROWTH IN THE ENGLISH SUCKLER HERD IN DECEMBER

The total number of cattle and calves in England as of December was up almost one per cent on the year at 5.36 million head, according to the latest statistics from DEFRA.

In recent years the breeding herd in England has been steadily falling, from just over 2.0 million in 2005 to a low of 1.84 million in December 2013. However, with the last two years bucking this trend, the breeding herd in December was reported to be almost 1.88 million head. Most of this growth can be attributed to an increase in the dairy herd which, despite the challenges, has still grown another 14,000 head this year to 1.16 million head. Combined with the increase in December last year, this now means that the dairy segment of the breeding herd has grown almost 56,000 head since December 2012.

English breeding herd 2005-15



Source: DEFRA

Notably, the suckler herd was also reported to be up on the year in December for the first time since December 2010, albeit only a fraction. At 700,000 head there was an increase of 4,000 on the year earlier. This ends the extended period of time in which the component parts of the English breeding herd have been moving in opposite directions. While this does indicate a more positive position than has been the case in recent years, with lack of profitability still a concern in the suckler beef sector, it is far too speculative to suggest this marks a step change in the overall direction of travel of the sucker breeding herd in the longer term. Payments made under CAP could fall for many suckler beef producers, while the costs of meeting the requirements for support may well increase. In addition, fewer farmers may be able to access environmental stewardship payments. This will mean that suckler producers will have to rely even more on returns from the market for the future of their business. Given the fact that lack of profitability is still going to be an underlying issue, any notable expansion in the suckler herd does still seem fairly unlikely.

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Be aware of potential silage pitfalls of this season's forward grass growth

Dairy and other livestock farmers facing this season's widespread forward grass growth need to be aware of the pitfalls this could pose to silage making, if they are to maximise silage yield and quality, says Ecosyl product manager Derek Nelson.

According to Mr Nelson, old grass that has continued growing through the winter will not only be of poorer quality than fresher grass, in terms of energy and protein, but will also have a higher loading of naturally-present undesirable microorganisms that could add to clamp losses.

"Wherever you have old grass that has been growing since autumn, it is of poorer quality," he says.

"Instead of having young, leafy growth, some of it will be dying back, which provides nutrients for a wide range of bacteria and fungi to grow on. This will increase the numbers on the crop at harvest, increasing the risk of a poor fermentation and reducing aerobic stability at feedout, both of which will lead to significantly higher losses.

“If slurry is also applied too close to grass cutting, this adds to the problem by introducing more undesirable bacteria, such as enterobacteria and clostridia.

“Also, compared to shorter and more open grass crops, thicker grass crops create an ideal microclimate for undesirable microorganisms to thrive. Extended wilting will encourage their growth further.

“In these circumstances, it is even more important that wilting is rapid and the clamp filled and sealed quickly. This will be particularly effective at limiting yeast and mould activity.

“But you also need to ensure the fermentation gets going quickly as a rapid pH fall will inhibit the undesirable bacteria”, adds Mr Nelson. “This is brought about by lactic acid bacteria, which are normally in short supply on fresh crops. An effective silage inoculant will apply large numbers of specially selected strains of lactic acid bacteria, ensuring a fast, efficient fermentation that will inhibit the undesirable bacteria quickly.

“This will reduce DM losses but has other benefits too as it preserves more true protein and increases digestibility, both of which are beneficial for animal performance.

“A good quality silage inoculant offers benefits even in good silage-making conditions, but the benefits can be even more obvious in seasons like this when grass growth is more challenging.

“Bear in mind that all inoculants are not the same, so always check there is independent evidence to back any claims, especially those for improved animal performance,” he adds.

Vets welcome roll out of compulsory BVD testing in Northern Ireland

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the British Veterinary Association Northern Ireland Branch welcomed the commencement of the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme in Northern Ireland this week.

Seamus O’Kane, President of BVA Northern Ireland Branch, said:

“The introduction of compulsory BVD testing is a part of the joined-up DARD, profession and industry approach that is crucial for the delivery of a successful BVD eradication programme in Northern Ireland. We welcome the Minister O’Neill’s commitment to disease control and hope we will see similar successes as we did with our Officially Brucellosis Free declaration.”

Sean Wensley, President of BVA, said:

“Vets and farmers have been well engaged with the process so far to control BVD and keen to see it progress; the announcement for a compulsory BVD testing scheme was made more than two years ago so we are very pleased to see the roll out now of the legislation.”

Beef farmers in Northern Ireland lose £2m due to over-age cattle – LMC

Beef farmers in Northern Ireland lost over £2m (€2.56m) in 2015 due to over-age animals, according to the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC).

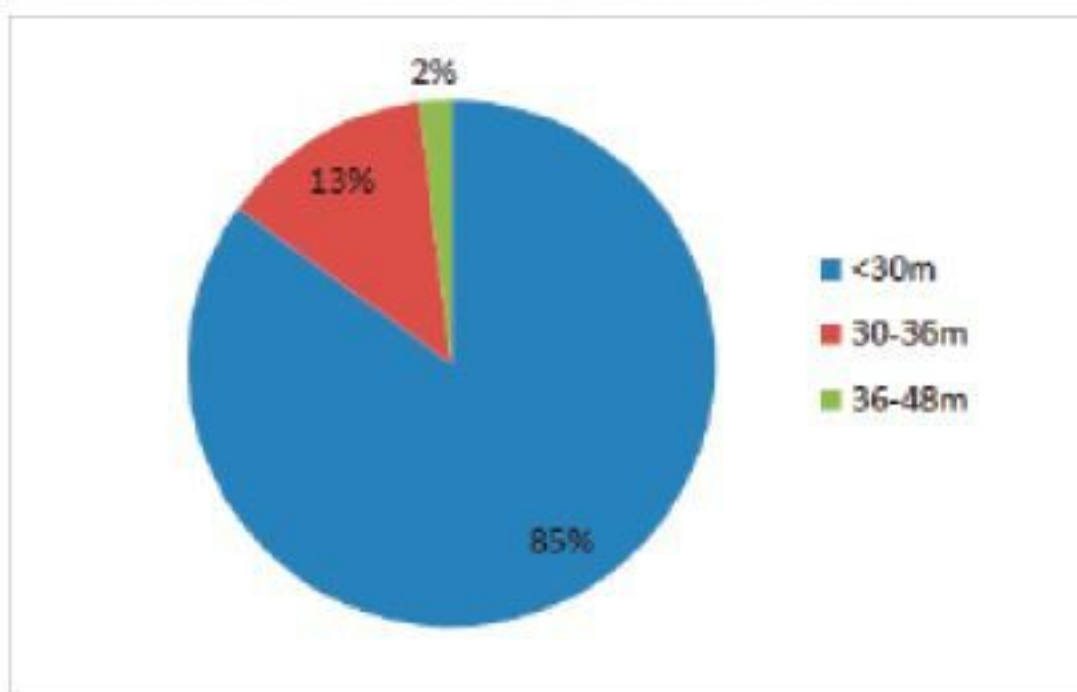
In 2015, there were over 280,000 cattle slaughtered in the North, but approximately 42,500 of these cattle were over 30 months of age, it shows.

These over-age cattle were penalised heavily, as the price difference between over 30 month and under 30 month cattle was 14p/kg (18c/kg).

During 2015, the average price paid for steers and heifers under 30 months of age was 332.5p/kg (425.7c/kg) compared to 318.4p/kg (407.6c/kg) for animals over 30 months of age, the LMC reports.

As a result of this price difference, beef farmers in Northern Ireland made the equivalent loss of £48.06 (€62) per head because these animals were more than 30 months of age. Figures from the LMC show that 85% of the cattle slaughtered in Northern Ireland during 2015 were under 30 months of age, while a further 13% were killed between 30 and 36 months. However, it says that beef farmers are becoming more efficient in Northern Ireland. According to the LMC, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of steers and heifers killed at 29 months of age, as producers kill cattle before the 30-month deadline. It also indicates that there have been slight reductions in the average age at slaughter of steers and heifers killed in the North, which is a sign of an improvement in efficiency. But, farmers must not lose focus in producing steers and heifers that meet the market specifications, as this is vital to maximise the returns on prime cattle that are presented for slaughter, the LMC advises.

Figure 1: Proportion of NI steer and heifer kill by age category 2015



Source: LMC

MPs hit out over beef prices paid to Northern Ireland farmers

A Westminster inquiry has said supermarket giants must do more to explain why Northern Ireland farmers get the lowest UK prices for red meat.

And it warned that dairy farmers must not become the victims of supermarket wars in which milk is sold as a loss leader to attract more customers.

The environment, food and rural affairs committee heard that price differentials cost beef farmers here around £17m a year.

Its report also questioned assurances by retail bosses that there was "no link" between the prices at which supermarkets sell goods and prices paid to farmers.

It said that trust between farmers and retailers had been damaged over the last 10 years and "must be restored and reinforced".

The report - which will bolster the investigation being conducted by the Assembly's agriculture committee - warned: "Regional price disparities pose a threat to the economic sustainability of the national market, with regions receiving lower average prices being made more vulnerable

to external price shocks and regions relying on an above average market price becoming vulnerable to undercutting over time."

The inquiry said the situation for dairy farmers in Northern Ireland was "particularly difficult, as three-quarters of milk produced (is) exported as milk powder".

Yesterday's inquiry, to which the Ulster Farmers Union gave evidence, concluded: "Retailers must adopt clear and transparent approaches to pricing and ensure that any regional price differentials for equivalent produce take into account the full costs of production and do not undermine the economic sustainability of farmers at a regional or national level.

"Supermarkets may choose to sell milk cheaply as a loss leader, but farmers must not be the victims of the supermarket wars currently taking place in the UK."

Recent research showed farm incomes had fallen far further and faster in Northern Ireland than in Britain.

Economist Paul Gosling said incomes shrank by 17% in real terms in 2014 compared to a fall of just 4% in the rest of the UK.

Almost one in seven farms (14%) in the province now runs at a loss - with severe knock-on effects on employment and the overall economy.

Three EU countries now cleared to export beef to the US

The Netherlands has been cleared to export beef to the US market, making it the third EU country after Ireland and Lithuania to gain access.

The US market closed to EU beef imports after the BSE outbreak in the 1990s.

EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis, said that he welcomed the move as a sign of recognition for the EU's comprehensive and effective measures to eradicate BSE in Europe.

"I hope the US will now act expeditiously to extend the approval to all imports from the EU and I call on the remaining EU partners who still maintain restrictive measures to fully adopt recognised international standards.

Speaking after the announcement, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan said that the opening the US market to Dutch beef provides a further export outlet for the EU's high quality EU product.

Unlocking technical barriers to exports is part of our diplomatic offensive to drive exports and find new markets for EU producers.

The Commission has said that the opening of the US market to Dutch beef sends a positive signal to producers in other parts of the EU that are still waiting for the end of the disproportionately strict and lasting US trade restrictions.

The US market has been closed to EU beef since January 1998, when the US introduced import restrictions on beef, as well as sheep, goats and their products, on the basis of BSE concerns.

These measures went beyond the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) according to which deboned beef, for instance, is safe and can be freely traded from all countries regardless of its BSE status.

In addition, the Commission said that according to the OIE evaluation of BSE risk in the EU Member States – based on standards established in 2005 -, almost all of them presented not more, and sometimes less risk than most countries in the world. In other words, EU beef is safe.

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The advertisement for Meadow Quality is set against a light green background. At the top left, it says "MEADOW QUALITY" in bold black letters, with "LIVESTOCK TRADING SINCE 1975" underneath. To the right is a circular logo for "GRAIG PRODUCERS Organic Livestock Farmers". Below this, three black cow icons are arranged horizontally. The text "If you are looking to buy or sell any of the following:" is centered. Below that is a list of livestock types: "Finished cattle | Store cattle | Cull cows and bulls | Suckler replacements | Baby calves Reared calves | In-calf heifers | Milking cows | Organics". Further down, it states "We have an experienced team of livestock specialists able to provide you with free, unbiased advice" and "We cover England and Wales and we are able to offer a local service with national presence." At the bottom, contact information is provided: "Or call: 01789 734113", "www.meadowq.co.uk", and "info@meadowq.co.uk". Social media icons for Twitter (@meadowquality) and Facebook (Meadow Quality Ltd) are also included.



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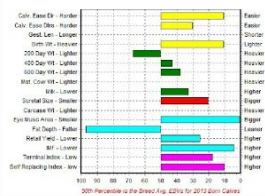
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|------|--------------|--------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------|
| | DIR (%) | DTRS (%) | (kg) | (kg) | (kg) | (kg) | (kg) | (cm) | (sq cm) | (mm) | (%) | (%) |
| EBV | +2.3 | +1.6 | +1.3 | +29 | +63 | +81 | +11 | +1.0 | +7.4 | +0.5 | +1.3 | +0.5 |
| Acc. | 39% | 25% | 83% | 71% | 75% | 66% | 26% | 69% | 44% | 54% | 43% | 41% |

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