

# Beef Road Map 2030

## Beef sector profile

Beef farming is one of the larger sectors in Irish agriculture and accounts for one third of overall agricultural output due partially to a strong period of increased prices. Approximately 80% of Irish farms carry some beef animals with 55% of Irish farms considered to be specialist beef producers. In recent years there has been an increase in the volume of beef produced from animals born in the dairy herd (now approximately 60% of the total) in comparison to progeny from the suckler herd and we have seen a decrease in the number of suckler cows over the same period. Suckler cows account for approximately a third of the total cows (beef and dairy) in Ireland. Suckler cow herds tend to be smaller on average (20 cows) than dairy herds (100 cows).

In 2024, the value of Irish beef exports was estimated at €3.12 billion with the UK remaining the primary market, accounting for 47% of these exports. Overall cattle output value is expected to be circa €3.9 billion in 2025. The volume of Irish beef exports increased by 3% from 2023 although reductions are expected over the coming years due to tightening cattle supplies and reducing carcass weights. Reduced finishing age (which tends to lead to reduced carcass weights) is one of the key mitigation measures to reduce emissions from the sector. The challenges facing the industry include low profit margins, slow uptake of new technologies, an aging farmer population and increasing competition from off-farm employment.

## Beef sector statistics

**55%**

Of farm families farm mainly beef, **25% have some level of beef enterprise**

Average family farm income 2022-24

**Cattle rearing: €400/ha**

**Cattle other: €508/ha**

Average farm size 2022-24

**Cattle rearing: 31.7 ha**

**Cattle other: 33.9 ha**



**Output Value (2024)**

Of total agriculture, beef accounts for **30%**



**Beef LU (2024)**

Of total livestock units, beef accounts for **57%**

### Exports



**Beef meat exports**  
(tonnes)

2022	<b>503,000</b>
2023	<b>493,000</b>
2024	<b>507,000</b>

**Export value (€ millions)**

2022	<b>2,680</b>
2023	<b>2,602</b>
2024	<b>3,120</b>

### Outputs



**Cattle output - value**  
(€ millions)

2022	<b>3,026</b>
2023	<b>3,013</b>
2024	<b>3,064</b>
2025	<b>3,897</b>

### Census (December)



**Suckler cows**

2022	<b>861,700</b>
2023	<b>818,600</b>
2024	<b>767,800</b>

**Cattle under 1 year**

2022	<b>1,995,400</b>
2023	<b>1,973,800</b>
2024	<b>1,922,500</b>

## Current beef metrics and future targets

	Key performance indicator	2023	2030	Target
<b>Suckler calf to weanling</b>	Stocking rate (LU/ha)	1.5	1.5	2.2
	Inorganic fertiliser N (kg/ha)	55	45	100
	Herbage utilised (t DM/ha)	6.5	6.5	8.6
	Calving at 23-26 months of age (%)	23	30	100
	Calving rate (calves/cow)	0.89	0.90	0.95
	Gross margin per ha	699	820	1,540
	Net margin per ha	151	242	935
	GHG emissions (kg CO <sub>2</sub> e/kg liveweight)	12.1	11.6	10.9
	Fertiliser N applied as protected urea (%)	8	35	100
	Slurry applied by LESS (%)	45	100	100
<b>Suckler weanling to beef</b>	Stocking rate (LU/ha)	1.4	1.4	2.2
	Inorganic fertiliser N (kg/ha)	47	40	100
	Herbage utilised (t DM/ha)	6.1	6.3	8.6
	Supplementary concentrate fed (t/head)	695	650	665
	Steer carcass weight (kg/head)	388	388	395
	Steer carcass grade	R=3=	R=3=	R=3=
	Steer finishing age (month)	27.5	26	22.5
	Heifer carcass weight (kg/head)	336	336	315
	Heifer carcass grade	R=3=	R=	R=3=
	Heifer finishing age (mo)	26	25.5	19.5
	Gross margin per ha	652	815	1,940
	Net margin per ha	33	164	1,240
	GHG emissions (kg CO <sub>2</sub> e/kg liveweight)	10.8	10.6	7.9
	Fertiliser N applied as protected urea (%)	3	35	100
Slurry applied by LESS (%)	56	100	100	

## Current beef metrics and future targets continued...

	Key performance indicator	2023	2030	High perf. target <sup>1</sup>
Dairy calf to beef	Stocking rate (LU/ha)	1.8	2.0	2.3
	Inorganic fertiliser N (kg/ha)	64	60	145
	Herbage utilised (t DM/ha)	7.6	7.8	10.6
	Supplementary concentrate fed (t/head)	766	700	620
	Steer carcass weight (kg/head)	319	319	310
	Steer carcass grade	O=3=	O+3=	O+3=
	Steer finishing age (mo)	27.1	26	22
	Heifer carcass weight (kg/head)	279	279	-
	Heifer carcass grade	O=3+	O=3=	-
	Heifer finishing age (mo)	25.1	24	-
	Gross margin per ha	900	1,11	2,450
	Net margin per ha	167	214	1,760
	GHG emissions (kg CO <sub>2</sub> e/kg liveweight)	6.5	6.4	5.9
	Fertiliser N applied as protected urea (%)	10	35	100
Slurry applied by LESS (%)	51	100	100	

<sup>1</sup> Early maturing steer-beef systems

## Beef sector challenges and responses supported by Teagasc

### Economic



#### Market outlook

Medium term market outlook for beef is positive due to a reduced output of beef in the UK and Europe and a strong live-export market.



#### Farm Incomes

Beef farm input costs have remained stable, while output values have risen due to a strong export market. As a result, farm income from production is expected to grow. However, the sector remains highly dependent on income support measures to maintain profitability.

Teagasc will continue integrating research and knowledge transfer efforts to enhance the economic sustainability of the Irish beef sector. Our focus remains on lowering production costs, improving performance and sustainable output, and accelerating genetic progress at the farm level.

## Beef sector challenges and responses supported by Teagasc continued...

### Social



#### Work-Life Balance

Beef farmers are increasingly seeking a better work-life balance as off-farm employment places greater demands on their time. Teagasc will demonstrate the technologies available to beef farmers to make better use of their time while also improving productivity and profit.



#### Technology

New and emerging technologies may provide opportunities to optimise farm operations, improve animal performance, and support more sustainable and profitable beef production. Teagasc will evaluate the potential impact of these new technologies on Irish beef farmers and demonstrate their benefits by collaborating with our network of demonstration farmers who are actively implementing them on their farms.



#### People

Encouraging younger farmers to enter beef farming is challenging due to low income prospects and the growing demands of off-farm work. Teagasc will showcase the most profitable beef farming systems for both full-time and part-time operations, utilising the latest research and technologies to maximise time efficiency.



#### Health & safety

Livestock-related accidents are the primary cause of injuries on Irish beef farms, highlighting the significant risks farmers face while working with cattle. Teagasc continues to support beef farmers in implementing better animal handling facilities and breeding more docile cattle. Raising awareness and implementing safety measures are essential to reducing accidents and protecting farmers' well-being.



#### Enterprise integration

As the proportion of beef from dairy-bred calves continues to rise, breeding decisions within dairy herds are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping the output of beef herds. Teagasc programmes enhance beef breeding within the national dairy herd by promoting the adoption of decision-support tools, such as the Dairy Beef Index and Commercial Beef Value.

## Beef sector challenges and responses supported by Teagasc continued...

### Environment



#### Water quality

Minimising nutrient runoff into waterways is essential for enhancing water quality. Teagasc actively supports efforts to improve water quality through collaborative initiatives, including the Better Farming for Water: 8 - Actions for Change campaign, the Agricultural Catchments Programme, the ASSAP programme, and the new Farming for Water EIP.



#### Carbon efficient farming

Beef farming needs to be more carbon efficient and to lower overall carbon emissions. Teagasc has set out practical steps to reduce emissions for beef farmers in the Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC). This is supported by a range of research and advisory programmes including “Signpost” and “AgNav” designed to help beef farmers make sustainable changes while maintaining productivity.



#### Biodiversity

The Irish beef sector aims to adopt measures to preserve and enhance biodiversity on farms, focusing on both its quantity and quality. Through the ‘Signpost’ programme, Teagasc is investigating ways to balance production with biodiversity improvements for optimal results.



#### Soils

Maintaining soils in good health with good physical, chemical and biological condition is essential for future farming. Teagasc programmes support use of comprehensive nutrient management planning.



#### Animal Welfare

Beef production systems need to have the highest standards of animal health and welfare. Teagasc is developing tools and guidelines to enhance animal health and welfare, in particular focusing on the prevention of diseases and reducing resistance to anthelmintics and antibiotics.

### Contact



**Paul Crosson**

[paul.crosson@teagasc.ie](mailto:paul.crosson@teagasc.ie)

**Pearse Kelly**

[pearse.kelly@teagasc.ie](mailto:pearse.kelly@teagasc.ie)



The road map for beef is available on [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)