

# Preparing for Breeding Success

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2025



## Farmer Focus



**David Brady**  
Stradone, Co. Cavan



### Farm Profile

**Calving start date:** 12th February

**% of the herd calved:** 64%

*"We have 64% of the cows calved and we are tracking around 10% back on last year. We aim to have over 80% calved still in the first six weeks of calving. In 2024 calving season resulted in a 370 day calving interval, and an 85% six week calving rate. This ultimately drove the herd performance to 524kg Ms delivered per cow at a protein and butterfat percentage of 3.64% and 4.61% respectively".*

### Targets for 2025 Breeding Season

Every breeding season we target to produce a replacement heifer better than the top 10% of the herd. Our ideal cow in future is achieving over 560kg MS/Cow delivered of 4% protein, and 5% butterfat, calving in February each year for 6+ lactations.

Our 2025 calves have the potential to reach our targets with a PTA for protein of 0.19%, Fats of 0.27%, milk Kg of -9kg and a fertility sub-index of €122. In order to keep this rate of genetic gain we only breed from cows achieving over the average Kg Ms, Protein & Butterfat %, while calving in the first 6 weeks of the calving season. We rely heavily on our milk recording data for selecting the cows to receive sexed semen to produce replacement heifers.

This year after an outbreak of TB we are only left with six 1-2 yr olds for bulling, as a result we purchased a AA bull to serve these as A.I. was going to be too labour intense on the out farm for a small number of heifers.

### Bull Selection

When selecting sires we target Fertility sub-index, Milk sub-index driven by high Protein & Butterfat % PTA's. After this they select on Health, and Maintenance to ensure a healthy medium size cow.

We set a minimum criteria of their bull team as follows; EBI €300 +, Fertility €140 +, Production €100 +, Maintenance €12 - €20, Health €7+, Protein % .20%+, Butterfat % .30%+, and combined Kg MS of 30Kg+.

High Dairy Beef Index (DBI) bulls will be used on cows not selected dairy matings. When selecting beef bulls for use on the dairy herd, David believes that a team of bulls is required to serve the needs of every cow in the herd – a selection of bulls, ranging in carcass weights, carcass conformation, and calving difficulty. They aim to maximise carcass weight and conformation will selecting suitable calving difficult for the different parities within the herd.

	EBI(€)	EBI Sub Index								PTA's						
		Milk (€)	Fert (€)	Carb (€)	Calv (€)	Beef (€)	Maint (€)	Mmgt (€)	Hlth (€)	M Kg	F Kg	P Kg	F+P Kg	F %	P %	CI days
All Cows in Herd	226	72	108	9	32	-14	15	1	2	49	11.6	8.9	20.5	0.17	0.13	-6.0
Predicted 2026 Calves	289	94	126	10	44	-12	16	2	9	48	15.8	11.1	26.9	0.25	0.17	-7.2
Bulls Weighted Averages	351	116	144	11	55	-11	18	2	16	46	20.0	13.3	33.3	0.32	0.21	-8.3

## Preparing for the Breeding Season ahead

With most farms entering the second half of their calving season, the focus has shifted to ensuring a successful breeding season in 2025. With the settled period of weather, herds have commenced the grazing season. With the correct management, this will ensure cows are fed the highest quality feed on farms in the form of grazed grass; thus minimising the period spent in negative energy balance and loss of body condition in the herd.

## Assessing Body Condition Score (BCS)

As cows strive to hit peak production over the next month, it is imperative to maximise BCS gains, and minimise the period of time in negative energy balance. Each ½ BCS lost by the cow releases 80 UFL for production but requires an extra 110 UFL in intake to replace, over and above maintenances and production.

Therefore it is imperative to assess BCS regularly throughout the spring to ensure cows are in optimal condition for breeding at 3.0 BCS. Any cows below optimal should be considered for once a day milking to reduce their energy demand from production and increase the proportion of energy allocated for maintenance.

## Time to Book the First Milk Recording

The herd's first recording should take place within 60 days of the first cow calving in order to get an evaluation of the dry cow period and heifer pre-calving management. This milk recording is also critical for the early indicators of milk performance from each cow in the herd especially first lactation animals.

Ideally the lifetime milk recording report combined with the latest milk recording reports should be used for dam selection. The aim should be only to breed replacement heifers from cows achieving above the herd's average Kg Ms, Protein & Butterfat %, and calving in the first six weeks of calving.



Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc Joint Development Programme has produced this Spring Management Series. Our advisors are currently available by phone to discuss all farm related matters.

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