

RANGE OF FACTORS IMPACT CONFORMATION SCORES OF NI PRIME KILL

VIDEO Imaging Analysis (VIA) has been used in the seven major beef processing plants in NI to grade cattle to the 15 point scale since March 2011. Each of the major plants are required to carry out calibration and grading accuracy checks on the machine each day and to implement a daily maintenance programme. DAERA is then responsible for the statutory inspection of machine performance and ensuring that classification and carcass presentation are consistent and carried out to the required EU standard.

The settings of the VIA machines installed in local plants are all set to the same standard and cannot be altered and therefore the grades they assign to carcasses provide a consistent representation of the NI cattle kill. The conformation scores awarded to prime cattle at point of slaughter can however be influenced by a range of factors including carcass weight, age, breed, source of cattle being killed and the finishing system used.

Steers

Analysis of conformation scores awarded to price reported steers during the ten week period ending 10 June 2017 have indicated a general downward movement in the scores awarded when compared to the same 10 week period in 2016. As indicated

in Table 1 the proportion of U grading steer carcasses declined from 20 per cent of the price reported kill in the 2016 period to 17 per cent in the 2017 period. The proportion of R grading carcasses followed a similar trend with 37 per cent of steers achieving an R grade during the 2017 period, back from 39 per cent in the 2016 period. Meanwhile the proportion of O grading steers in the price reported kill increased from 31 per cent in the 2016 period to 35 per cent in the 2017 period. There was also an increase in the proportion of P grading steers in the slaughter mix, up by two percentage points to 11 per cent in the 2017 period.

Analysis of price reporting data has indicated that steers in NI were killed an average of 11 days earlier and 6kg lighter during the 2017 period when compared to the same period in 2016. Both of these factors may have contributed to the downward movement in conformation scores recorded year on year. Recent work by AFBI has indicated that there is a clear relationship between carcass weight and conformation scores with lighter carcasses achieving poorer conformation scores than heavier carcasses.

The source of cattle being presented for slaughter

Table 1: Conformation scores awarded to price reported steer kill in NI during the ten week period ending 10 June 2017 and corresponding period in 2016

Kill Year	E	U	R	O	P
2016	0%	20%	39%	31%	9%
2017	0%	17%	37%	35%	11%

Table 2: Conformation scores awarded to price reported heifer kill in NI during the ten week period ending 10 June 2017 and corresponding period in 2016

Kill Year	E	U	R	O	P
2016	0%	19%	50%	25%	6%
2017	0%	17%	47%	30%	6%

will also have an impact on the conformation scores awarded. During the 2017 period 60 per cent of price reported steers were sourced from the NI suckler herd compared to 62 per cent in the 2016 period. Meanwhile the proportion of beef cross steers slaughtered accounted for 24 per cent of price reported steers in the 2017 period, up from 23 per cent in the 2016 period. The remaining 16 per cent of the kill in the 2017 period were dairy sired steers, up from 15 per cent in the 2016 period. The increasing influence of dairy genetics in the NI slaughter mix may also have contributed to the changes in conformation scores year on year.

The increasing use of traditional breed bulls such as Aberdeen Angus and Hereford in NI instead of continental breeds may also have contributed to the downward movement in the conformation scores awarded. Aberdeen Angus and Hereford steers accounted for 23 per cent of the price reported steer kill in the 2017 period, up from 20 per cent during the same period in 2016.

Heifers

Similar trends can be observed if we look at the conformation scores awarded to price reported heifers in NI during the 10 week period ending 10 June 2017 as outlined in Table 2. U grading carcasses accounted for 17 per cent of price reported heifers in the 2017 period, back from 19 per cent in the same period in 2016. Meanwhile R grading carcasses accounted for 47 per cent of price reported heifers during the 2017 period, back from 50 per cent in the 2016 period.

As with the steers there has been an increase in the proportion of heifer carcasses achieving an O grade during the 2017 period when compared to year earlier levels. O grading heifers accounted for 30 per cent of the price reported kill in the 2017 period, up from 25 per cent in the 2016 period. The proportion of P grading heifers was unchanged at 6 per cent year on year.

Heifers killed during the 10 weeks ending 10 June 2017 had an average carcass weight of 316kg, back 4kg from 320kg during the same period in 2016. There was however no change in the average age at slaughter. As discussed previously there is a direct correlation between carcass weight and grade so the drop in average carcass weights may have contributed to the downward movement in grades awarded year on year.

There has also been a slight shift in the source of heifers being killed in NI plants. During the 2017 period 69 per cent of heifers were sourced from the suckler herd, back marginally from 70 per cent in the corresponding period in 2016. Beef cross heifers accounted for 25 per cent of the price reported heifer kill, up one percentage point from year earlier levels. The proportion of dairy sired heifers in the price reported kill remained unchanged year on year at 6 per cent.

The proportion of Aberdeen Angus and Hereford heifers in the NI slaughter mix has also recorded an increase. During the 2017 period 24 per cent of price reported heifers were Aberdeen Angus or Hereford, up from 22 per cent during the same period in 2016. As with the steers this increase may have contributed to the downward movement recorded in conformation scores.

It should also be noted that the production conditions on NI farms may also have impacted on the conformation of cattle being presented for slaughter during spring and early summer of 2017. A difficult grazing season during 2016 will have impacted cattle performance at grass and impacted housing weights last autumn but may also have had a detrimental impact on silage quality. Both of these factors may have contributed to the lower carcass weights which in turn may have contributed to the downward movement in conformation scores awarded.

PRODUCERS ENCOURAGED TO CHECK HERD LISTS FOR ID QUERIES

ANIMAL traceability is at the cornerstone of the NI beef industry, not only for ensuring the effectiveness of disease control programmes, but also for providing public health and trade assurances for the safety of our beef before it enters the food chain. Under EU regulations processing plants must have procedures in place to guarantee that each animal they slaughter is properly identified and these procedures are then verified by DAERA vets working in the processing plants on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Previously when there were anomalies in the identification of a beef animal in the processing plant dentition checks to verify the age of the animal were enough to determine its eligibility for the food chain. However new guidance recently issued to processing plants requires animal traceability to be prioritised when determining a beef animal's eligibility for use in the food chain no matter what the age of the animal.

It is therefore important that DAERA vets working in the processing plants can determine that the animal booked in for slaughter is the same animal which was notified to DAERA at birth. In cases where the identity of the animal is not 'reasonably ascertainable' it is declared unfit for human consumption and is condemned. In recent weeks reports have indicated that a small number of cattle have been condemned at processing plants across NI because full traceability cannot be determined due to unresolved identification statuses placed on the animals. All herd-keepers are therefore encouraged to request a herd list from DAERA to

check if any cattle in their herd have ID status queries against them. While there are a range of status queries that can be applied to cattle the key queries which herd keepers need to keep a close eye out for are;

- NNO:** birth notification not received, incomplete or received more than 27 days from date of birth
- DOBQ:** the registration of the date of birth is incomplete or there is a discrepancy between the animal and the DOB registered on APHIS
- IDQ:** animal not identified correctly or animal description does not match original registration details

If a herd keeper identifies an animal with any of these critical ID statuses, or indeed any ID statuses, in their herd they should contact their local DVO as soon as possible to try and get any issues resolved well in advance of transporting cattle for slaughter. Failure to rectify any IDQ statuses could lead to a considerable financial loss if the animals in question were to be declared ineligible for entry into the food chain.

POINTS TO NOTE

- It is in the farmer's interest to rectify animal ID issues as early as possible and do not leave it until the animal comes into the abattoir
- Most ID statuses are trivial and most can be resolved with the right level of support from DAERA
- Where it proves impossible to reasonably ascertain the identity of an animal (this should be a very rare occurrence), it is better to establish this as early as possible so that the producer can make appropriate management decisions

LMC URGES PRODUCERS TO USE THE BVD PI REMOVAL SCHEME

LMC, in partnership with AWHNI, is delivering the BVD PI removal scheme which targets the removal of BVD infected animals from NI farms. Farmers who may have an eligible calf will receive a claim form from AWHNI, which must be completed and returned to LMC. All details as to eligibility and how to claim will be included in the accompanying guidance and is also hosted on the LMC and AWHNI websites. The rate of financial assistance available is

- £160 for a beef calf
- £130 for a dairy heifer calf
- £50 for a dairy male calf

To date LMC has fully processed 517 claims for payment with £54,560 distributed to eligible producers. To date 70 per cent of processed applications have been successful.

CATTLE TRADE

NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 19/06/17	Next Week 26/06/17
Prime		
U-3	360 - 366p	362 - 366p
R-3	354 - 360p	356 - 360p
O+3	348 - 354p	350 - 354p
P+3	296 - 314p	294 - 314p
Including bonus where applicable		
Cows		
O+3 & better	270 - 290p	270 - 280p
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 17/06/17	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	374.7	373.7	369.3
R3	369.1	369.0	366.2
O+3	360.6	359.9	352.2

*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 17/06/17	Wgt <220kg	Wgt 220-250kg	Wgt 250-280kg	Wgt >280kg
P1	187.9	200.5	211.1	234.3
P2	199.2	227.4	250.1	260.4
P3	227.4	247.8	266.9	270.8
O3	-	266.6	284.7	286.2
O4	-	-	286.9	289.6
R3	-	-	386.0	303.1

Deadweight Cattle Trade

BASE quotes from the major NI plants for U-3 grade prime cattle have held steady this week at 362-366p/kg. Quotes for good quality O+3 cows came back this week to 270-280p/kg. Similar quotes for all types of cattle are expected for early next week.

The plants have reported steady supplies of prime cattle coming forward for slaughter to meet demand for beef. Prime cattle throughput in NI last week totalled 6,187 head, back 360 head from the previous week but higher than the 5,847 prime cattle slaughtered in local plants during the corresponding week in 2016. Cow throughput in local plants last week totalled 2,066 head, an increase of 357 head from the previous week and the highest weekly cow throughput since mid-February 2017.

A total of 265 prime cattle were imported from ROI for direct slaughter last week with 18 prime cattle also imported from GB. These imports accounted for five per cent of total prime cattle throughput in NI last week. Imports of cows from ROI for direct slaughter in NI plants last week totalled 93 head with 222 cows also imported from GB for direct slaughter. These imports accounted for 15 per cent of cow throughput in local plants.

The deadweight trade for prime cattle in NI last week continued to improve with the average steer price increasing by 2.4p/kg to 362p/kg while the R3 steer price increased by 1.3p/kg to 371.5p/kg. The R3 steer price in NI last week was at its highest level since December 2013. The average heifer price in NI last week was almost unchanged at 361.3p/kg while the R3 heifer price increased by 2.7p/kg to 371p/kg. The average young bull price was up by a penny last week to 353.3p/kg while the R3 young bull price was up by 1.7p/kg to 366.4p/kg.

The deadweight trade for prime cattle also generally improved in GB last week with the average steer price up by 2.9p/kg to 361.8p/kg and the R3 steer price up by a penny to 370.8p/kg. The R3 steer price increased in all of the GB regions last week with the exception of Southern England where it was back by 2p/kg. The average heifer price in GB last week was up by 2.8p/kg to 366.2p/kg while the R3 heifer price was unchanged at 372.5p/kg. The R3 heifer price recorded increases in the Midlands and Northern England last week while it recorded declines in Scotland and Southern England.

The average cow price in NI last week was back half a penny to 267.8p/kg while the O3 cow price was up by 1.8p/kg to 285.8p/kg. This was higher than all the other UK regions with the exception of Scotland where the O3 cow price was 285.4p/kg. The average O3 cow price in GB last week was 277.2p/kg, 8.6p/kg lower than the equivalent price in NI.

The deadweight trade for prime cattle in ROI was generally back last week in euro terms however a stronger euro has meant prices recorded increases in sterling terms. The R3 steer price was up by 1.2p/kg to 358.4p/kg in ROI last week while the R3 heifer price was up by 2.3p/kg to 369.2p/kg.

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

	W/E 17/06/2017	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	374.9	367.8	381.7	370.8	372.4	372.6	374.5
	R3	371.5	358.4	383.3	364.9	367.3	366.5	370.8
	R4	371.3	359.5	386.7	376.2	366.7	366.6	375.5
	O3	359.4	343.9	353.2	337.8	337.1	340.9	342.2
	AVG	362.0	-	378.8	358.1	354.8	353.8	361.8
Heifers	U3	374.1	382.9	390.8	383.7	381.8	378.1	384.0
	R3	371.0	369.2	381.7	363.8	371.6	368.8	372.5
	R4	367.6	368.4	384.1	371.5	368.0	365.9	373.0
	O3	360.3	353.5	365.2	351.8	345.0	346.9	352.2
	AVG	361.3	-	381.7	365.0	360.4	355.2	366.2
Young Bulls	U3	369.3	364.0	378.3	358.8	366.7	368.0	367.0
	R3	366.4	354.9	372.6	351.8	356.5	362.1	359.0
	O3	345.2	336.9	323.2	312.2	330.2	333.6	323.2
	AVG	353.3	-	368.3	334.7	349.2	348.7	349.0
Prime Cattle Price Reported		5398	-	6541	7196	7218	4673	25628
Cows	O3	285.8	285.4	289.9	272.1	276.6	277.6	277.2
	O4	289.5	285.8	290.5	277.1	280.1	281.7	281.0
	P2	248.9	263.4	241.9	234.8	225.1	235.4	232.0
	P3	268.3	278.5	255.7	252.9	233.1	249.4	244.9
	AVG	267.8	-	278.9	253.8	247.8	248.9	252.9

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=87.93p 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 17/06/17	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
Finished Cattle (p/kg)						
Steers	215	234	221	185	214	200
Friesians	160	173	167	139	158	148
Heifers	212	228	215	176	208	190
Beef Cows	160	197	172	120	159	140
Dairy Cows	119	139	124	75	118	98
Store Cattle (p/kg)						
Bullocks up to 400kg	220	269	240	190	219	208
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	200	225	215	180	199	190
Bullocks over 500kg	205	221	212	175	204	188
Heifers up to 450kg	210	250	225	170	209	190
Heifers over 450kg	195	213	205	160	194	178
Dropped Calves (£/head)						
Continental Bulls	300	460	360	210	298	260
Continental Heifers	250	420	300	140	248	190
Friesian Bulls	120	190	155	70	118	95
Holstein Bulls	100	180	125	5	98	50

SHEEP TRADE

SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 19/06/17	Next Week 26/06/17
Lambs >21kg	465-480p	445-455p

REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 03/06/17	W/E 10/06/17	W/E 17/06/17
NI Lambs L/W	442.1	447.4	456.6
NI Lambs D/W	471.5	462.9	476.4
GB Lambs D/W	504.4	504.3	509.4
ROI D/W	484.9	475.1	489.1

Deadweight Sheep Trade

QUOTES from the processors this week for R3 grade lambs came back this week to 450-460p/kg up to 21kg with quotes of 445-455p/kg up to 21kg expected for early next week. In the same week last year quotes for R3 grade lambs were 365-385p/kg across the major plants. Lamb supplies have started to pick up with 8,769 lambs killed in local plants last week, the highest weekly throughput for the year to date. A further 5,319 lambs were exported from NI to ROI for direct slaughter last week, accounting for 38 per cent of total lamb output from NI. The deadweight lamb price in NI last week was 476.4p/kg, up 13.5p/kg from the previous week. In ROI last week the average lamb price recorded a similar increase to 489.1p/kg.

This week's marts

The trade across the marts this week was generally back from previous weeks with the number of lambs passing through the sale rings increasing in the majority of marts. In Swatragh last weekend 650 lambs sold from 435-461p/kg compared to 450 lambs the previous week selling from 439-483p/kg. In Kilrea on Monday 470 lambs sold from 418-432p/kg compared to 380 lambs the previous Monday selling from 470-512p/kg. In Saintfield this week 566 lambs sold from 400-440p/kg compared to 486 lambs last week selling from 465-500p/kg. A smaller show of lambs in Ballymena this week saw 858 lambs sell to an average of 408p/kg compared to 1,100 lambs last week selling to an average of 460p/kg. Top reported prices for cull ewes this week generally ranged from £90-110.

LATEST SHEEP MARTS

From: 16/06/17		Lambs (P/KG LW)			
To: 22/06/17		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	460	400	452	-
Saturday	Omagh	662	439	465	-
	Swatragh	650	435	461	-
Monday	Kilrea	470	418	432	-
	Massereene	1016	425	450	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	566	400	440	-
	Rathfriland	586	390	425	412
Wednesday	Ballymena	858	390	442	408
	Enniskillen	322	390	432	-
	Markethill	900	400	430	-
	Armoy	356	400	445	-

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