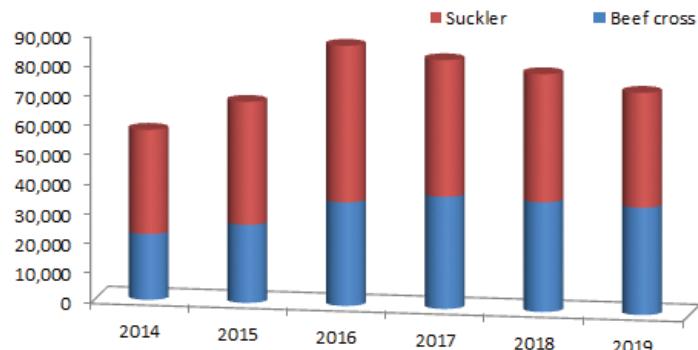


# FALLING SUCKLER COW NUMBERS TO IMPACT ON NI SLAUGHTER MIX

DURING March 2019 there were 31,658 beef sired calves registered in Northern Ireland which brings the total for the year to date to 75,105 head. This is seven per cent behind the 80,398 beef sired calves registered during the same period in 2018.

While there has been an overall decline in calf registrations there have also been changes to the type of calves registered. The shift towards more beef calves registered to dairy cows over the past few years has started to be reflected in the types of cattle presented for slaughter in local plants and also the types of beef cattle passing through the local marts.

**Figure 1: Breakdown of beef sired calf registrations by origin during quarter 1 2014-2019**



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Suckler	35,272	41,612	52,928	46,173	43,324	38,832
Beef cross	22,253	26,385	35,003	37,935	37,074	36,273

The overall reduction in beef sired calf registrations can be primarily linked to a decline in suckler cow numbers which were back by five per cent in December 2018 according to the DAERA agricultural survey. Calf registrations to suckler cows declined by 4,492 head or ten per cent during the first quarter of 2019 when compared to the same period in 2018.

Meanwhile beef sired calf registrations to dairy cows were almost unchanged with 36,273 beef cross calves registered during the first quarter of 2019, compared to 37,074 calves in the same period in 2018. The proportion of beef cross calves has been steadily increasing in recent years and they

Beef cross cattle tend to be killed at a slightly older age than suckler origin stock which may influence cattle availability for slaughter at particular times of the year. During 2019 to date the average age at slaughter for a suckler origin steer was 24.6 months while the average age for a beef cross steer was 25.3 months. This is the equivalent of an extra three weeks on heifers.

A shift towards more beef cross cattle in the slaughter mix will also contribute to a decline in the average carcase weight. During the first quarter of 2019 the average carcase weight of a suckler origin steer was 376kg compared to 347kg for beef cross steers.

Meanwhile the average suckler origin

accounted for 48 per cent of all beef calf registrations during 2019 to date. This is up from 46 per cent in the same period last year with the proportion steadily rising from 38 per cent of total beef registrations in the same period in 2014.

The decline in suckler calf registrations while beef cross calf registrations hold stable has resulted in a larger proportion of beef cross cattle on NI farms for beef production. This will have a profound influence on the type and quality of cattle being presented for slaughter in local plants.

heifer carcase weight was 334kg during 2019 to date compared to 308kg for beef cross heifers. While these lighter carcases meet current market specifications they have a lower meat yield which means processors will have to kill more cattle to get the same volume of beef for processing. This will incur additional costs to the industry.

More beef cross cattle in the slaughter mix will also impact the grades achieved at point of slaughter. As outlined in

**Table 1: Conformation scores of price reported prime cattle by type during 2019 to date.**

	E	U	R	O	P
<b>Suckler</b>	1%	29%	53%	17%	1%
<b>Beef Cross</b>	0%	2%	28%	68%	3%



Table 1 the majority of suckler origin cattle are awarded a U or R grade while most beef cross animals achieve an R or an O grade. This will impact on the potential returns to the producer as carcases with better conformation attract higher prices and are also likely to be heavier. It will also have implications for the processor as any changes to the type of cattle being presented for slaughter will impact the specifications which major processors can meet.

# 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](mailto:events@farmersjournal.ie) or call 0035314199578 to reserve a place.

## 2019 Spring Conference

### PROSPECTS FOR NI AND UK AGRICULTURE

Thursday 11 April - Limited places available

Brought to you by



### FQAS Helpline

If you have had a recent inspection and need help and advice to rectify any non-conformances, contact the FQAS helpline:  
028 9263 3024

## FQAS MART CLINICS APRIL 2019

MC's Farm Liaison Officer, Terry White, runs Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) mart clinics at a range of Livestock Marts across Northern Ireland. Terry is present to assist members of FQAS with non-conformances, general scheme queries and any issues prior to or following an inspection.

Any farmers who wish to join the scheme can also do so through their local FQAS mart clinic. Terry will be available at the livestock marts listed in the table. For further information call (028) 9263 3024.



LOCATION	DAY	DATE
Omagh	Monday	08/04/19
Saintfield	Wednesday	10/04/19
Markethill	Tuesday	16/04/19
Enniskillen	Thursday	18/04/19
Kilrea	Wednesday	24/04/19
Ballymena	Friday	26/04/19

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Tel: 028 9263 3000

# WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS

**LMC**

## CATTLE TRADE

### NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 01/04/19	Next Week 08/04/19
<b>Prime</b>		
U-3	330 - 334p	330 - 336p
R-3	324 - 328p	324 - 330p
O+3	318 - 322p	318 - 324p
P+3	272 - 280p	272 - 282p
Including bonus where applicable		
<b>Cows</b>		
O+3 & better	228 - 245p	234 - 250p
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 30/03/19	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	337.7	344.8	326.0
R3	334.5	336.5	324.7
O+3	326.0	327.4	315.7

\*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

### REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 30/03/19	Wgt <220kg	Wgt 220-250kg	Wgt 250-280kg	Wgt >280kg
P1	133.9	148.9	157.8	178.2
P2	158.8	183.5	198.4	210.3
P3	196.6	198.1	211.4	219.2
O3	-	225.9	239.6	238.6
O4	-	-	232.1	241.6
R3	-	-	-	260.4

### Deadweight Cattle Trade

BASE quotes from the major NI beef processors ranged from 330-334p/kg for in spec U-3 grading steers and heifers this week with a slight improvement to 330-336p/kg expected for early next week. The cow trade has continued to improve with base quotes for good quality O+3 grading cows ranging from 234-250p/kg next week.

Prime cattle throughput in NI last week totalled 6,677 head which brings total year to date throughput in 2019 to 88,966 head. This is three per cent higher than the same period in 2018 when 86,738 prime cattle were slaughtered locally. Cow throughput in local plants increased last week to 1,822 head which brings total cow throughput for 2019 to 22,920 head. This was back 15 per cent from the 26,924 cows killed in local plants in the first quarter of 2018.

Cattle imports to NI for direct slaughter from ROI last week increased to 187 prime cattle and 49 cows. This brings the total prime cattle imports from ROI in the first quarter of 2019 to 2,349 head up 1,761 head when compared to 588 prime cattle imported from ROI in the same period in 2018. A further 11 steers and 25 cows were imported from GB for direct slaughter last week. Cattle exports from NI to ROI last week included 43 prime cattle and 49 cows. This brings the total prime cattle exports to ROI in the first quarter of 2019 to 292 head, back 397 head when compared to the 689 head exported to ROI in the same period in 2018.

The deadweight cattle trade for prime cattle held relatively steady in NI last week with the average steer price back 0.4p/kg to 329.4p/kg and the R3 steer price up by 0.4p/kg to 338p/kg when compared to the previous week. The average heifer price in NI last week was back a penny to 331.6p/kg while the R3 heifer price was back 0.6p/kg to 337.7p/kg. The cow trade firmed in NI last week with the average cow price up by 3.1p/kg to 220.7p/kg while the O3 cow price increased by 4.2p/kg to 238.5p/kg from the previous week.

In GB last week the deadweight trade for prime cattle generally held steady with the average steer price up by 0.8p/kg to 336.7p/kg while the R3 steer price slightly decreased to 342.6p/kg. This puts the differential in R3 steer price in NI and GB at 4.6p/kg compared to a differential of 7.8p/kg in the same week in 2018. The average heifer price in GB last week was back marginally to 337.1p/kg while the R3 heifer price increased by 0.8p/kg to 344p/kg. This puts the differential in R3 heifer prices last week between NI and GB at 6.3p/kg compared to a differential of 8.4p/kg in the corresponding week in 2018. The cow trade also firmed in GB last week with the average cow price increasing 0.8p/kg to 226.5p/kg while the average O3 price increased by 1.5p/kg to 251.3p/kg.

The deadweight trade in ROI came under pressure in both euro and sterling terms last week. The R3 steer price decreased by the equivalent of 4.3p/kg to 312.8p/kg with the R3 heifer price decreasing by 2.6p/kg to 325.6p/kg. This puts the differential in R3 prices with NI at 25.2p/kg for steers and 12.1p/kg for heifers.

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

	W/E 30/03/19	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	339.2	320.4	347.5	350.0	348.6	344.6	348.1
	R3	338.0	312.8	346.6	346.0	341.0	337.5	342.6
	R4	335.9	313.8	351.8	351.6	340.5	337.4	346.8
	O3	325.5	297.7	325.6	328.6	317.6	316.8	322.2
Heifers	AVG	329.4	-	345.7	342.6	328.6	327.8	336.7
	U3	345.5	337.2	352.8	355.5	355.4	350.8	354.0
	R3	337.7	325.6	346.3	348.4	342.2	338.8	344.0
	R4	336.0	325.8	350.3	347.1	342.2	334.7	344.4
Young Bulls	O3	327.3	308.6	332.3	332.3	316.0	320.5	324.8
	AVG	331.6	-	347.7	340.8	331.7	325.9	337.1
	U3	327.0	297.7	336.2	331.6	336.6	343.4	335.2
	R3	325.2	290.2	336.0	320.9	323.9	330.5	325.2
Prime Cattle Price Reported	O3	309.7	273.1	301.6	294.1	294.8	310.9	297.1
	AVG	311.2	-	317.2	309.2	299.6	320.7	308.0
	W/E 30/03/19	5,837	-	6,305	6,818	7,166	4,337	24,626
	O3	238.5	230.5	253.8	252.3	249.1	252.0	251.3
Cows	O4	241.2	231.2	255.4	255.7	250.2	248.0	252.1
	P2	200.2	197.4	214.3	204.6	204.7	208.3	206.8
	P3	216.6	219.9	224.2	217.7	224.3	225.6	223.7
	AVG	220.7	-	250.8	233.6	218.6	221.6	226.5

Notes:

- (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=85.49p 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

	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY			
	W/E 30/03/19	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
<b>Finished Cattle (p/kg)</b>							
Steers		198	208	204	170	194	185
Friesians		-	-	-	-	-	-
Heifers		194	206	199	170	192	182
Beef Cows		147	195	164	120	146	130
Dairy Cows		106	128	114	70	104	88
<b>Store Cattle (p/kg)</b>							
Bullocks up to 400kg		230	277	250	210	229	215
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg		215	235	225	180	214	195
Bullocks over 500kg		200	221	207	170	198	185
Heifers up to 450kg		210	233	225	180	209	195
Heifers over 450kg		200	223	210	170	199	185
<b>Dropped Calves (£/head)</b>							
Continental Bulls		300	375	335	200	295	250
Continental Heifers		250	390	300	150	245	200
Friesian Bulls		120	215	170	50	115	85
Holstein Bulls		55	100	75	2	50	30

# SHEEP TRADE

## SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 01/04/19	Next Week 08/04/19
Hoggets> 22kg	425-440p	450-465p
Lambs> 21kg	500p	500p

## REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 16/03/19	W/E 23/03/19	W/E 30/03/19
NI L/W Hoggets	390.3	395.4	412.8
NI D/W Hoggets	421.0	417.9	429.2
GB D/W Hoggets	419.3	426.6	438.2
ROI D/W	422.1	423.8	426.7

Contact us:

Website: [www.lmcni.com](http://www.lmcni.com)

Telephone: 028 9263 3000

Fax: 028 9263 3001

FQAS Helpline: 028 9263 3024

Answerphone: 028 9263 3011

Comments: [bulletin@lmcni.com](mailto:bulletin@lmcni.com)

## Deadweight Sheep Trade

THE deadweight trade for hoggets strengthened as the week progressed with base quotes ending the week ranging from 450-465p/kg up to 22kg. The plants are quoting 500p/kg up to 21kg for R3 grading spring lambs. Throughput of hoggets/lambs in NI plants last week totalled 5,279 head which was up 829 head from the previous week. This brings the total number of hoggets/lambs slaughtered in the first quarter of 2019 to 66,040 head, back 21 per cent when compared to the same period in 2018. ROI continues to act as an important outlet for NI with 3,734 lambs/hoggets exported for direct slaughter last week. The average deadweight hogget price in NI last week was 429.2p/kg, up 11.3p/kg from the previous week. In ROI last week the deadweight lamb/hogget price was up by the equivalent of 2.9p/kg to 426.7p/kg.

## This week's marts

THE hogget trade has also improved across many of the marts this week. In Swatragh last Saturday 520 hoggets sold from 363-475p/kg compared to 600 hoggets the previous week selling from 339-439p/kg. In Massereene on Monday 529 hoggets sold from 410-442p/kg compared to 536 hoggets last week selling from 390-424p/kg. In Ballymena on Wednesday 1,065 hoggets sold to an average of 420p/kg, an improved trade from the previous week when 775 hoggets sold to an average of 390p/kg. In Markethill this week 1,070 hoggets sold from 400-460p/kg compared to 700 hoggets last week selling from 390-450p/kg. Small numbers of spring lambs are beginning to pass through the marts with prices ranging from 440-527p/kg. Top reported prices for cull ewes ranged from £96-133.

## LATEST SHEEP MARTS

From: 29/03/19		Hoggets (P/KG LW)			
To: 04/04/19		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	86	397	422	-
Saturday	Swatragh	520	363	475	-
	Omagh	201	404	465	-
Monday	Massereene	529	410	442	-
	Kilrea	380	417	474	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	544	405	450	-
	Rathfriland	190	390	452	400
Wednesday	Ballymena	1065	390	480	420
	Enniskillen	302	438	487	-
	Armagh	386	415	454	-
	Markethill	1070	400	460	-

Information supplied by LMC / DAERA/ AHDB/ DAFM

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# LMC REPRESENTED AT IMS MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS' WORKSHOP

MC's Industry Development Manager Colin Smith has recently returned from Canada, where he attended a marketing and communications' workshop hosted by the International Meat Secretariat (IMS).



The overarching theme of the event was – ‘Meat’s place on the Plate.’  
IMS is a non-profit organisation, that represents the global meat and livestock sector as a vital motor of growth for the sustainable supply of safe, healthy, high-quality and nutritious animal protein. It ensures the meat sector’s contribution as an essential part of a healthy, sustainable diet.

Reflecting on the range of issues discussed at the workshop, Colin said: “The challenges faced by Northern Ireland’s red meat industry are largely the same as those experienced by meat industries across the world.

“Likewise, the marketing-related issues that confront the LMC are similar to those faced by levy bodies in all other countries.

“Marketing budgets are under constant pressure and demonstrating the value of marketing to stakeholders can be difficult.”

He continued: “Creative material must resonate with the consumer, who we are trying to influence and create understanding as they go about purchasing their meat, not just with the stakeholders and this is not always easily explained.”

Colin pointed out that declining meat consumption in developed countries and the emergence of alternative proteins is a reality and not one that the

meat industry can escape adding:

“Fortunately, the industry is coming from a position of dominance in the protein market. However, if the meat industry does not act now the alternative protein industry will continue to take market share. The flexitarians and the permission seekers, who are small but very vocal groups, are the individuals who need to be influenced.

“If this group decide to eat less meat, this will have a negative influence in the developed markets such as the EU. The alternative meat industry is extremely well funded by influential individuals. The meat industry must monitor this competition closely.”

The LMC representative went on to point out that while it is recognised that the meat industry is under threat from the rise of alternative proteins now competing for a share of the wider protein market, it is also recognised that the animal protein market is still

dominant.

“The biggest concern for the meat industry is not the rise in the number of vegans or vegetarians but the rise in the number of consumers who may decide to eat less meat than they do currently.”

Where meat substitutes are concerned, Colin said that the international meat industry must know about the companies producing plant based or lab cultured protein.

The fundamental questions are: how are they funded, who is supporting them and what messages are they using to influence consumers?

“The meat industry must be a player within the category, identify the knowledge gaps and work collaboratively to improve the situation.”

He concluded: “The meat industry must act now. It is important to avoid being sucked in to being defensive but rather be pro-active in trying to change the

increasingly negative narrative around red meat. We must be a player in the market and let the challenge from the alternative protein industry be a catalyst for innovation and proactivity.

“As an industry we must work to understand our consumers’ needs and give them the freedom to enjoy eating red meat. We must innovate to remove the barriers to purchase by providing meal solutions that consumers demand and provides them with an eating experience that brings them back to the red meat aisle again and again.

“Red meat consumption in Europe is projected to decline in the next 10 years. The rate of that decline will depend on what we do next.

“These projected trends provide a fundamental challenge for levy bodies like the LMC. So, do we attempt to stem the decline, look for opportunities elsewhere, or address both issues with equal vigour?”

# LMC REMAINS COMMITTED TO SHEEP RESEARCH

LMC has long recognised the need for independent, applied research to be carried out on behalf of the local sheep industry. The organisation is represented on the AgriSearch sheep advisory committee by Colin Smith, LMC's Industry Development Manager.



"Securing long-term sustainability objectives is as important for sheep as it is for all the other sectors within local agriculture," he said.

"Given this priority, LMC has provided specific funding support to AgriSearch, which tops-up the monies received courtesy of the sheep levy.

"This is to ensure that relevant research projects, designed to benefit the sheep industry as a whole, can be adequately funded. This is an ongoing commitment from LMC."

Over the past number of years LMC has contributed to a number of important sheep projects delivered through the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

These include:

- 1) Investigation of the relationships between genotype, trace element status and gastrointestinal parasite infections in lambs, and the development of nutritional and management strategies to increase lamb output from grazed grass.
- 2) Development of beef and sheep systems for improved sustainability, biodiversity and delivery of ecosystem services within hill areas of Northern Ireland
- 3) The development of breeding strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Northern Ireland sheep sector
- 4) Optimising ewe efficiency through better recording
- 5) Effects of sheep grazing strategies on animal performance and grass production, utilisation and quality.

Colin Smith concluded: "AgriSearch was established to identify and fund applied research projects, which will help deliver enhanced levels of production and efficiency at farm level right across Northern Ireland.

"These are critically important priorities for the sheep sector, which LMC is committed to fully supporting into the future."

## IN MY OPINION: RICHARD HALLERON

MARKETING and promotional activities relating to the 2019 Beef Week have, no doubt, caught the imagination of consumers the length and breadth of the UK over recent days. And here in Northern Ireland we have a lot to celebrate. Our soils, green fields and climate allow us to produce beef of exceptional quality and taste.

Our farmers have a long reputation for providing consumers, both here and around the world, with beef that reflects every consumer demand possible. But words mean very little today. Backing-up claims for any food product is the acid test when it comes to getting consumer approval and acceptance. And, again, here in Northern Ireland we pass this test with flying colours.

Our Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) is the envy of the world. This is a view universally held by meat industry experts, not only here in Northern Ireland but throughout Europe and beyond.

Farm Quality Assurance is delivering a market premium on every certified beef animal that goes up a local kill line. And, no doubt, this figure may well increase with the passing of time. The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) has been central to the development of FQAS.

But it also does a critically important job when it comes to promoting home produced beef to local consumers.

Today Northern Ireland enjoys negligible risk status where BSE is concerned. This is the safest level of certification which the World Organisation for Animal Health can stand over, where this disease is concerned. And, again, the Commission played a central role in helping to deliver this decision on behalf of every cattle farmer in Northern Ireland.

The beef sector must look, increasingly, to its own resources as it strives to secure long-term sustainability.

**Image 1:** Pictured at the Beef Week launch last week are, from left: Joe McDonald, Asda, David Brown, UFU, Hugh McGahan, ABP, Colin Smith, LMC and Cherrie Kenny, LMC.



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The days are coming to an end when farmers can expect the proverbial 'cheque in the post' to dig them out of a hole.

And it is in this context that the future impact of FQAS and the impact of the LMC must be gauged. The market is king and what discerns food products that secure premium prices from those that don't are their heritage and the depth of the 'quality assured' principles which they reflect.

The good news is that the LMC has done a tremendous job for every local livestock farmer in helping to make all this a reality in the here-and-now. It's now a case of building for the future.



Contact us:

Website: [www.lmcni.com](http://www.lmcni.com)

Telephone: 028 9263 3000

Fax: 028 9263 3001

