



### **Maximising growth rates of organic cattle**

To produce organic cattle that are well grown and efficiently finished requires attention to detail in the rearing, growing and finishing phase to maximise profit and to keep up with changing demands in the market. Each phase of growth depends on breed, frame size and target market. To maximise and exploit growth potential the stock and system must work together based on available resources – type of stock compatible with feed, land, housing, machinery, labour and finance.

Formulating feeding rations from conception to market and subsequent carcass quality will not only contribute to animal health but cost of production and therefore profit margins. The frame size of an animal determines mature live weight and is a guide to its growth potential and relevant feeding management. Growing animals have a large appetite in comparison to body weight and flourish on high levels of medium energy forage. High levels of starch would lead to unwanted fat especially in small-medium framed, “easy fleshed” cattle.

Finishing cattle have a reduced appetite in relation to body weight and have a rapid weight gain. This stage requires feeding high energy cereal based feeds. High starch in take at this stage can bring on fast weight gains and more efficient feed conversion particularly in the larger framed, more difficult to flesh animals. Feed conversion efficiency (FCE) reduces as the animal ages and becomes heavier. Worms, Laminitis disease, coat, lameness, food hygiene, water and housing are all areas to be targeted to maximise performance and reduce cost.

Grass is potentially the cheapest feed available incorporating modern organic varieties and appropriate types of clover. Well maintained grassland leading to silage quality, cut at the optimum time clearly makes the greatest difference with the lower rations of concentrate that are typical of organic farming.

Examining cattle droppings is a useful indicator of how well the rumen is functioning and how well an animal is digesting their diet. If the rumen is working well few feed particles should be seen and little recognizable food. 80% of cattle not sleeping, eating or drinking should be ruminating.

Fine tuning animal performance and maximising growth rates through efficient feeding management is therefore instrumental in reducing days to slaughter and the cost of production.

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