



### Winners of the Foyle Valley Producer Club Carcass Competition 2008

- Beef Winner:**  
Ivan Loughery
- Aberdeen Angus Joint Winners:**  
Stephen Lowry and Hugh McCollum
- Hereford Winner:**  
Cecil Kincaide
- Lamb Winner:**  
Jim Allen

### Winners of the Balmoral Show 'Specially Selected Steak' Competition 2008

John McCrea from Strabane was announced as the winner of the Tesco 'Specially Selected Steak' competition at the Balmoral Show fry-off. Second place was awarded to James McKean of Strabane and third went to Michael Healy from Londonderry.



**PRODUCERS CLUB**  
Quality through Partnership

# focus

The official newsletter of the Foyle Valley Producers Club  
Issue 13 – February 2009

## FFG Trial New Service for Beef Producers

Foyle Food Group is introducing an exciting new text message service for all beef producers. Farmers will be able to receive the weights and grades of their slaughtered cattle via text message.

Once registered for the service, a text will automatically be sent to subscribers at the end of the day. (See Picture)

The text message service will provide the following information:

- Tag:** Last three digits of ear tag
- Kill:** Kill number used for animal

- Sex:** Sex of animal
- Grade:** Grade assigned by grader on the line
- Wgt:** Weight of combined sides taken at the scale

The service is absolutely free and offers beef producers a more convenient way to obtain live, up-to-date information. Raymond Deery, Procurement Manager at Foyle Meats, believes it will improve communication between the FFG and beef producers. "It will be a great benefit to everybody when phone lines are busy; farmers may call a few times to get this information, but a text makes the process easier." The text service is available on request. Please forward mobile details to Procurement Managers, Raymond Deery at Foyle Meats or Gavin Clements at Omagh Meats.



### National Fallen Stock Scheme Foyle Proteins

For collection please contact:

- Co Londonderry: Amanda Taylor  
Mon-Fri (9 to 5) 02871 861 120  
After Hours 07845 080 310
- Co Tyrone/Fermanagh: Francis McGirr  
02889 545 082
- Co Antrim/Down: Steven Hanna  
07860 682 177
- Co Armagh/Est Tyrone/5th Londonderry: Frances Gallagher  
07801 644 866

All farmers must be registered with the NFSCo

### www.foylevalleyproducersclub.com

- View the weights and grades of your cattle – updated every hour
- View the latest prices paid for your cattle
- Latest Club News, Competition News and Results
- Links to Weather Forecasts
- Information on the Aberdeen Angus Scheme and Hereford Scheme
- Special Offers

Ask Your Procurement Manager or Cattle Payments Administrator for a Username and Password

or email:

[Cattlepayments@omaghmeats.com](mailto:Cattlepayments@omaghmeats.com)  
or [RaymondD@foylemeats.com](mailto:RaymondD@foylemeats.com)

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Tel: +353(0)9096 43344  
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Email: [info@easyfix.ie](mailto:info@easyfix.ie)  
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[www.foylevalleyproducersclub.com](http://www.foylevalleyproducersclub.com)

## FFG Project on Rubberised Slats

Tesco, in conjunction with FAI (Food Animal Initiative), have asked Foyle Meats to carry out a trial finishing cattle on rubber slats. Foyle Meats supplier Ivan Loughery, who runs a beef and lamb farm in Limavady with his son, has been participating and we have some interesting preliminary results.

The background to the trial is that studies have shown that cattle have a strong desire to lie down for approximately 10 hours in a day, often preferring to do this while eating. They do not like to lie on cold, wet or hard flooring, especially on uneven surfaces. Cattle will move abnormally when flooring is slippery, restricting natural walking ability, which can lead to lameness. Rubberised slats can be beneficial as they have the potential to provide a non-slip, relatively soft and thermal comfortable lying area, thus providing a good alternative to traditional slatted housing methods.

Two of Ivan Loughery's slatted concrete pens were coated with rubber prior to cattle being housed last autumn. One was completely rubberised and the other left as concrete for about a metre depth next to the feed face. Ivan felt this was advantageous as cattle tended not to lie in this area leaving the feed face clearer for the other cattle in the pen to feed. This indicates that the cattle prefer to lie on rubber over concrete when given a choice. Other

observations from Ivan and his family are that when walking through the cattle on the rubber slats the cattle are more likely to jump and kick out. This could be viewed as a negative, but it does tell us that the cattle feel confident in the flooring and so full of life that they wish to move about on three legs! Ivan is confident that the cattle thrived better on the rubberised slats with the same quantity of feed. Plans are in place to quantify this accurately next year as it would obviously facilitate uptake if we could demonstrate that the system is beneficial to farmer's margins.

A quick calculation around Ivan's kitchen table showed that with current pricing something in the order of 7kg additional liveweight would be required to offset the cost of placing slats assuming that the slats have a 7 year lifespan. There is a 40% capital grant imminently coming forward from DARD which could be used to offset the cost of putting down rubber slats. With increased interest and knowledge of the requirements of housed cattle from food retailers and others, now based on practical and scientific evidence, this could be a very sound investment. Why not make use of this grant to undertake your own trial and let us know how you get on next year?



## Welcome to the Thirteenth edition of the Foyle Valley Focus

In 2008, global forces resulted in increased fuel, feed and fertilizer costs, which are all key variable costs that impact on costs of production and profitability for a beef farm. These challenges were faced by all in the industry and as the year ended these costs calmed down. Beef prices saw a sustained improvement in 2008 and into 2009 in comparison to prices in 2007. This was due to these aforementioned factors as well as the strong international demand for beef. There are also significant indications that the 'credit crunch' is impacting on the beef industry as consumers decide to trade down to cheaper cuts of meat. The reduced demand for higher value hindquarter cuts presents another challenge for the beef processors and retailers. As a key supplier in the food chain, the FFG remains focused on the end consumer in delivering products that meet the needs of modern lifestyles. The increased international demand for manufacturing and forequarter cuts must also be seen as an opportunity. The FFG is currently developing new markets in Central and Eastern Europe such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. As the economies in these countries grow and they become more sophisticated, we would also anticipate a growing demand for hindquarter cuts in the future. Looking forward, I am convinced that with our dedicated beef supply chain, our reputation of high quality beef, we can continue to innovate and grow cattle to a standard that will consistently impress our customers.

Thank you once again for your support,

**Terry Acheson, Director,  
Foyle Food Group**

# AAQB Ltd Update

Following on from our success in winning the 'Supply Chain Excellence Award' section of the NI Food and Drink Awards Competition in November 2007, Tesco has awarded Finest\* accreditation to our product. This is a great accolade for the Aberdeen Angus Quality Beef/ Foyle Meats partnership as it is the first time that the UK Tesco technical team have given the Finest\* accreditation to locally produced Aberdeen Angus beef.

The Aberdeen Angus breed has been farmed in Northern Ireland successfully since the early nineteenth century and owes its success to the excellent grassland, strong tradition of family owned farms which provides the perfect location to produce this premium beef product. We are delighted that all the beef now sold on Tesco NI fresh meat counters is Tesco Finest\* Northern Ireland Aberdeen

Angus beef, born and reared on AAQB members farms from across the Province.

As a commitment to maintaining premium quality, all our Aberdeen Angus cattle are sired by a registered pedigree Aberdeen Angus bull and individual animal details are registered on the AAQB database. This verification process provides product assurance and offers a strong local provenance, making it truly the 'Finest' product.

We wish to acknowledge our supplying members for maintaining a regular weekly throughput and to our partners, Foyle Meats for their expertise in developing markets for Aberdeen Angus beef. The challenge for 2009 is to continue developing our business while maintaining the exacting standards of our verification process for the benefit of our customers. If you wish to find out more about the AAQB Scheme, please contact Eamon Kelly on +44 28 8225 8035 or mobile +44 78 1317 6939.



## Sales of Mince Soar

The current economic environment is shaping the way that consumers are shopping, but despite the challenges it is great to see that customers continue to actively buy beef. Mince sales have seen strong growth as customers continue to shop for affordable meal solutions and it is the strength of the mince that continues to drive the business – it is our biggest single sub group within beef, commanding a significant share of our total beef business. This demand has proven challenging for processors in terms of balancing the carcass but at the same time it creates a real opportunity for OTM cattle and Holstein bulls finished under 16 months of age.

Although the strength of our Value range is at an all time high, we continue to look for ways to balance the business and help customers buy Organic and Finest beef. There is a huge opportunity to trade customers back up into the premium tiers of our beef range by improving product consistency. The other big opportunity is to convert existing Tesco customers that don't currently buy meat from us.

The work of our Sustainable Beef Project (TSBP) is geared towards developing this opportunity and we are actively looking at better ways of improving the quality and consistency of cattle coming through the meat supply chain. The TSBP group met for the second time in September since the launch in January 2008. The group welcomed John Driscoll who joined the team as Senior Red Meat Buyer. The aim of the TSBP is to improve the relationships within the supply chain, in order to improve the quality and consistency of beef sold in our stores. The project is primarily focused on three main areas of work: herd health planning, alternative bedding substrates and finding new ways of producing and monitoring the quality and consistency of our beef both in terms of tenderness and flavour.

To find out more about the TSBP and other latest news stories please visit: [www.tescofarming.com](http://www.tescofarming.com)

**Alice Pattinson, Tesco**  
**TESCO**

# Hereford Scheme Update

"Tender, succulent and full of flavour" – such is the growing reputation of Hereford beef – produced from Northern Ireland's pastures and now marketed as a premium brand by Omagh Meats. The quality and consistency of the product is safeguarded by the fact that every beef animal is sired by a fully registered, pedigree Hereford bull so that at least 50% pure Hereford genetics is guaranteed every time.

"Our Hereford scheme producers are all fully quality assured and the majority of the

cattle are supplied direct from the farm where they were born", says David Smyth, scheme coordinator.

"The weekly Hereford intake takes place every Tuesday at the Omagh Meats plant and we now have around 100 producers supplying the scheme. They find that the natural easy fleshing of the Hereford allows them to produce a high quality product with its distinctive eating quality from much less intensive management systems." The challenge for 2009 is to set up strategic

regular supplies with either food service or retailing customers.

**David can be contacted on  
+44 78 0807 8117.**



# NIMEA Update

There is no doubt that the global economic outlook is much gloomier than it was when the last newsletter was published a year ago. Back then, the whole focus of the industry was the Taskforce report which stated that the price of suckler bred beef had to move to a new level to have any chance of leaving a producer return. With the global economic picture getting worse with each week that passed, it didn't look good for agricultural commodities.

However, even with the downturn, 2008 saw a remarkable improvement in farm gate prices that has been sustained into 2009 despite all the other bad news in the economy. Beef and sheep have performed superbly and with feed and fertiliser costs reducing after the rapid inflation of early last year, the picture doesn't look as bad. We speculated a year ago that a more favourable euro exchange rate would do wonders for an assault on the export market again. It is now significantly easier to do business in Europe, but we must remember that GB remains our core market and will remain so for some time.

Processors have had to adapt to a changing market with a switch from higher value steak and roasting cuts to more manufactured product as the 'credit crunch' hit consumer spending. That the industry has done so and sustained a good increase in prices means that beef and sheep producers can look forward with as much confidence as any other business can in this difficult economic time.

# Carcass Competition

The Foyle Valley Producer Club Carcass Competition has been running successfully for the past 8 years. Every year it is a strong contest in all sectors, with all entries of a similar high standard. The aim of the carcass competition is reward those beef and lamb producers who can demonstrate consistency in classifications, weights and grades, through a group of 4 animals. (Details of all last year's winners are on the back page.)

Omagh Meats will host this year's beef carcass competitions. You have the chance of winning top prize money for Beef £1,000; Aberdeen Angus £500; Hereford £500 and £500 for the winning group of lambs. Foyle Meats will host the lamb carcass competition. The competitions will follow the same structure as in previous years, operating on a points system according to weight and grade. The prizes will be awarded to the producer whose group of animals attains the highest number of points.

### Rules

- All categories are to be entered in groups of 4.
- Farm Quality Assurance is a requirement in all categories.
- Entries are restricted to one group for each of the competitions from each producer.
- Only steers and heifers are eligible for entry into the cattle competitions.
- To enter the Aberdeen Angus Competition producers must be members of the AAQB Scheme.
- To enter the Hereford Beef Competition producers must be members of the Hereford Scheme.

Please fill in and return the enclosed entry form to Foyle Meats or Omagh Meats by Friday 27th March.

The Beef, Aberdeen Angus and Hereford Competitions will take place at Omagh Meats on Tuesday 7th April.

The Lamb Competition will take place at Foyle Meats on Tuesday 7th April.

LAMB	
1st Prize	£500
2nd Prize	£250
3rd Prize	£100

BEEF	
1st Prize	£1000
2nd Prize	£500
3rd Prize	£250

ABERDEEN ANGUS	
1st Prize	£500
2nd Prize	£250
3rd Prize	£100

HEREFORD	
1st Prize	£500
2nd Prize	£250
3rd Prize	£100

LAMB COMPETITION			BEEF COMPETITION		
WEIGHT	18-21kg	10	WEIGHT	270-360kg	10
	OTHER	0		OTHER	0
GRADE	E2, E3	20	GRADE	E3	20
	U2, U3	10		U3, E2, E4L	15
	R2, R3	5		U2, U4L, R3	10
	OTHER	0		R2, R4L	5
				OTHER	0

ABERDEEN ANGUS COMPETITION			HEREFORD BEEF COMPETITION		
STEERS	250-360kg	10	STEERS	250-360kg	10
HEIFERS	240-360kg	10	HEIFERS	240-360kg	10
GRADE	E3, E4L, E4H	20	GRADE	E3, E4L, E4H	20
	U3, U4L, U4H	15		U3, U4L, U4H	15
	R3, R4L, R4H	10		R3, R4L, R4H	10
	O+3, O+4L, O+4H	5		O+3, O+4L, O+4H	5
	OTHER	0		OTHER	0