



### Winners of the Foyle Valley Producer Club Carcase competition 2009

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|-------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Beef Winner:</b>           | Gordon McFarland |
| <b>Aberdeen Angus Winner:</b> | Leslie Dunn      |
| <b>Hereford Winner:</b>       | Robert Magee     |
| <b>Lamb Winner:</b>           | Michael Burke    |

### Winners of the Balmoral Show 'Specially Selected Steak' competition 2009

Mr. Samuel Gibson of Sixemilecross was announced as the Winner of the Tesco Best Speciality Steak competition 2009 for his Limousin steak. His granddaughter, Jill Nutt, accepted the prize on his behalf from the Minister of Agriculture, Michelle Gildernew MLA, and Cliff Kells of Tesco. Samuel has been a life-long supplier of cattle to Omagh Meats, finishing over 500 cattle per year.

Second prize was awarded to PJ Kearney from Plumbridge for his Aberdeen Angus steak and third prize went to Raymond Clarke from Beragh for his Aberdeen Angus steak. The other 5 finalists were Raymond Crawford from Newtownstewart, Leslie Dunn from Bready, Sidney Jack from Ardstraw, Stephen Lowry from Cullion and Patricia McCollum from Limavady.

## Attention All Farmers



- Foyle Proteins is one of the most modern rendering plants in Northern Ireland and has been approved by DARD for processing
- Fallen animals and sampling and processing all over 48 month bovine which are required by legislation to be tested
- Our collectors and staff have been trained to handle all your requirements and to provide an efficient collection service for all farmers

#### Our Collectors are:

**Frances Gallagher:** 078 0164 4866  
**Ken Black:** 077 6766 2884  
**Peter Collins:** 078 0197 9118

#### To Join the NFSCo Scheme

Please call the following number: 084 5054 8888

#### To register an animal for collection

Please call the following number:  
 (Monday-Friday 8.00am - 5.00pm)  
 028 7186 1120  
 Out of normal working hours:  
 078 4508 0310



### 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**  
**or RaymondD@foylemeats.com**

Text Service for Weights and Grades is also available



# focus

The official newsletter of the Foyle Valley Producers Club  
 Issue 14 - March 2010

## Farmers Encouraged by Performance from Rubberised Slats

The interest and awareness of the requirements of housed cattle from food retailers and other customers continues. With this in mind, the Foyle Food Group, in conjunction with the Hilton Food Group, carried out a trial comparing finishing cattle on rubberised slats and concrete slats.



The trial, sponsored by EASYFIX, was based on normal commercial farming conditions. It analysed various aspects of finishing cattle, including daily live weight gain (DLWG), the cleanliness of the animals and welfare issues e.g. lameness.

The objective of this trial was two fold, 1) to obtain and use commercial production figures and establish the benefit of using rubberised slats, and 2) to use the observations and experience of the trial producers to communicate the results to other producers.

Three farmers participated in the initiative, which incorporated three different finishing systems - heifers, steers and young bulls. All the cattle, approximately 300 in total, were weighed prior to the trial and weighed again prior to slaughter. The number of days on the two types of slats was recorded in order to establish a DLWG for each animal. The farmers also observed and recorded any difference in cleanliness of the animals on each type of flooring and any incidence of lameness and the seriousness of each case.

## The Results

The data for each farm was combined and the overall result was very Positive. It showed a greater DLWG and an obvious commercial benefit for the animals housed on the rubberised slats - an overall difference of 4.63%! A further analysis on the number of days each animal was on the trial was also carried out. Animals on the trial greater than 60 days had a DLWG difference of 5.61% and greater than 90 days had a difference of 6.64%. This is a very significant outcome, proving that the commercial benefit improved the longer the animal was housed on the rubberised slats.

The experience and observations made by each of the trial farmers has also proved invaluable.

- As part of the trial the rubberised pens were ¾ covered. Each of the farmers believed that there are advantages to this, as it provided a hard area to keep feet worn and also reduced the initial capital cost.

- The animals on the rubberised slats had less lameness and sores on their feet. This is a very important welfare issue and will also reduce veterinary expenses and the time spent by farmers dealing with lameness.
- The animals were more lively, agile and content on the rubberised slats, which reflected the difference in DLWG.
- There was no obvious difference in the cleanliness of the animals.
- Each farmer had a very positive experience with the rubberised slats and the message is clear- try it out with one pen and see the benefits for yourself.

If you are considering investing in rubber slats with the prospect of further grants available this spring, please don't hesitate to contact the procurement team at Foyle Food Group for further information on the trial.

### EasyFix Slat Rubber for Quality Results



- 5 Year Warranty
- Used in all Agricultural Colleges, AI stations and Major beef producers

- Only DLG approved Slat Rubber in Ireland



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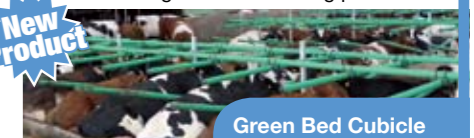
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- Cow Mat
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- Cubicle Mattress System
- Max Grip Mat
- Silage Pit Mat
- Anti-fatigue mat for milking parlour



Green Bed Cubicle



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

In our Meat Industry, the supply chain is constantly facing new challenges, whether it is in relation to changes in market demand, increased industry standards, climate change, animal welfare regulations, or when new technology presents itself. It can be difficult to gauge if these changes pose threats or opportunities. The Foyle Food Group aims to present itself as a modern proactive enterprise, dedicated to ensuring that its customers, both in the retail and catering sectors, only receive the highest quality Beef and Lamb.

Northern Ireland's prime cattle supply, wealth of agricultural knowledge and traceability systems puts us in an excellent position to deliver to key UK markets and growing European markets. The ongoing contraction of Britain's beef breeding herd, combined with this demand, means there is a real opportunity for us all to collaborate to supply what these markets require. Indeed, the competition for these markets remains intense, and the Foyle Food Group will aspire to meet the necessary demands of customers. Within the past year the Foyle Food Group has advanced many steps in developing new markets in Eastern Europe and this year we have further plans to improve our market position. The Foyle Food Group is dedicated to Tesco in supplying beef that meets the expectations of UK consumers, and Northern Ireland's cattle are well suited for Tesco Finest® Brand. Since our last Focus publication, there has also been a change at the Foyle Food Group; on 21 April 2009 the Foyle Food Group announced that the Acheson family had purchased the Watson family's shares within the Foyle Food Group. The Group is now wholly owned by the Acheson family. This shareholder buyout was by mutual agreement and enables the Foyle Food Group to pursue these new and exciting strategies.

Looking forward, I am convinced that with our dedicated beef and lamb supply chain, and our reputation for high quality beef and lamb, we can continue to innovate and develop to a standard that will consistently impress our customers. Thank you for your continued support, Terry Acheson, CEO, Foyle Food Group

## Tesco Update

"The second half of the year has proven a challenging time for both buying and selling beef.

Our competitors are continuing to be more aggressive in their activity and our customers continue to be more selective about what they purchase. As a result, trading has been heavily impacted by promotional activity as customers continue to be more aware of prices.

Global economic conditions are still affecting consumer confidence, but by offering our customers the right proposition, both customer numbers and frequency of purchase increased over the last 6 months.

Looking forward, we need to build on the work that we have done on Finest®, both in terms of improved raw material and butchery specifications. This will enable

us to clearly differentiate each of our pillar brands, and continue to focus our efforts on quality to ensure that our beef meets consumer expectations every time.

We will be working with the team at Foyle to ensure that our new plans for our Finest® cattle, such as improving tenderness by reducing cattle age to max 24 months, are communicated fully to the FFG Producer Club. We believe that such measures will give customers what they demand and also improve efficiencies throughout the supply chain."

David Maher Agriculture Manager, Tesco Stores Ltd



## Hereford – a big hit at the Merchant

One of Northern Ireland's leading hotels has confirmed that its patrons just can't get enough of locally produced Hereford beef.

"We put Hereford branded steaks on to our restaurant menu some months ago and the response from our clientele with regard to the eating experience they have enjoyed has been extremely positive," explained Tony O'Neill, Head Chef in Belfast's Merchant Hotel. "The beef we are getting is well matured, extremely uniform in quality and, in my opinion, represents the consummate eating experience. The meat is tender, succulent and has a natural taste, which is a unique characteristic of high quality beef." Tony attributes these qualities to the natural marbling of Hereford beef. As a result of this, the intramuscular fat dissolves in the cooking process, thereby releasing all this natural flavour into the meat.

The man responsible for introducing Hereford beef to Tony O'Neill was well known Moira-based meat merchant Peter Hannan. "When I became aware of the fact that a guaranteed and consistent supply could be secured, courtesy of the current arrangements between the Foyle Food Group and the Hereford Association, I jumped at



the chance of getting my hands on some of it. That was a number of months ago. I have since started supplying a number of customers with Hereford Branded steaks and every one of them, without exception, has come back asking for more."

He concluded: "In my opinion there is an almost insatiable demand for the quality of beef produced by Certified Hereford Cattle. I most certainly want to grow the business; the bottleneck is the shortage of certified supply at the present time."

I am fully aware that local beef farmers are under significant financial pressure at the present time. Given this background, I would advise them to consider carefully the option of producing Hereford branded beef. The Association is offering an attractive bonus for all grades of certified cattle at the present time. What's more, Hereford stock have a very good temperament and are easy to finish on-farm. The key to the reliability and consistency of the product is the sourcing of our supply. All our beef comes from local farms and is certified by the Hereford Cattle Society. We know that the animals are sired by Pedigree registered Hereford bulls and reared to exacting standards of animal health and welfare.

Robin Irvine, NI Hereford Association

## NIMEA – New Technology

This spring has seen the trialing of a new piece of technology in the processing industry that has led to much debate.

I am of course talking about Video Imaging Analysis (VIA), which is also known as "Mechanical Grading." Like all new technology there are those who cannot get enough of it while others are more cautious.

The Foyle Meats site was chosen by processors to undertake the trial because it could readily

accommodate the machine, and also because Foyle Meats already has considerable experience of mechanical grading at its nearby Donegal business.

As always with new technology there are fears about how well it will do the job. The general industry view is that where a machine can be programmed to do a job it will do so more cheaply and more consistently than any human. Over the past century agriculture has undergone a revolution, with productivity increasing massively through the use of technology, alongside improved crop and animal genetics. In the past, some farmers may have bemoaned the passing of the horse to the tractor and the horse drawn reaper giving way to the forge harvester. These now seem obvious steps forward.

The introduction of mechanical grading of cattle should be thought of in the same way as the pocket calculator or computer being introduced to replace manual tasks. However, the processing industry recognises that it is vitally important that cattle producers have the opportunity to develop confidence in this technology. That is why Foyle Meats has thrown its doors open for the farmer representative bodies to come and see the machine in place and at work. Of course Foyle Meats' suppliers have all had the same opportunity when they have been bringing cattle in over the past few months. Hopefully the industry can deal with any concerns that farmers may have about this new technology and the industry can move forward together and in agreement.

Phelim O'Neil, Nimea

## AAQB Ltd Update

Aberdeen Angus Quality Beef Ltd (AAQB) is now in its 12th year of exclusively supplying Foyle Meats with a consistent supply of AA cattle, sired by registered pedigree Aberdeen Angus bulls. Throughout this period Foyle Meats has supplied a full range of NIFQA Aberdeen Angus cuts, and in February 2008, the Tesco UK technical team awarded Finest® accreditation to our product. This has been a significant development for our business and continues to strengthen our Supply Chain Partnership with Foyle Meats and Tesco NI.

In 2009 we introduced a new initiative – the 'AAQB Challenge Cup' – to be awarded to the best Tesco NI fresh meat counter. Tesco's Newtownbreda Superstore, with an excellent counter display featuring a full range of quality Aberdeen Angus cuts, was our first proud winner. Congratulations to all the staff involved!

AAQB are committed to maintaining a premium quality product; this commitment is underpinned by our robust registration and verification process designed to ensure that all cattle meet the Scheme's criteria. We wish to acknowledge our supplying members for their continued support and commitment, and also our partners, Foyle Meats, for their expertise in developing markets for Aberdeen Angus beef, including high value markets in Europe.

The challenge for 2010 is to continue developing our business in line with market demand 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 028 8225 8035 or mobile 078 1317 6939.



## Carcase Competition

The Foyle Valley Producer Club Carcase Competition has been running successfully for the past nine years. Every year it is a strong contest in all sectors, with all entries of a similar high standard. The aim of the carcase competition is to 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.

Foyle Meats will host this year's carcase competitions. You have the chance of winning top prize money for Beef £1000; Aberdeen Angus £500; Hereford £500 and £500 for the winning group of lambs. Omagh Meats will also host the Hereford carcase 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 who achieves the highest number of points based on the group of 4 animals.

### 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.

Fill in and return the enclosed entry form to Foyle Meats or Omagh Meats by 26th March.

The Beef and Aberdeen Angus Competitions will take place at Foyle Meats on Tuesday 13th April 2010 and the Hereford Competition will take place at Omagh Meats on Tuesday 13th April 2010.

The Lamb Competition will take place at Foyle Meats on Tuesday 30th March 2010.

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