

## Irish Moiled Cattle Society

### Recommendations for Rearing Traditional Farmed Certified Irish Moilie Beef

A lot of the points highlighted are just good stock management practices already carried out by our members but should provide a basis for a recognised way of rearing quality grass fed 'Irish Moilie Beef'.

There is a belief that the secret to beef tenderness and flavour lies within pockets of fat the animal keeps for storage which they can call on in times of need.

These cells don't start developing until adolescence in cattle, they are very few in number in young calves, even if they are very fat these fats in young cattle are only stored in large layers on the surface not in the intra muscular cells. They don't affect the tenderness and flavour - they just add fat to the pan. These cells develop from early adolescence on but only start to fill in early adulthood when the animal stops growing. This is called the 'finishing stage' and is when the fat cells start to fill up and the cattle become ready for slaughter.

### The Finishing Stage

At this stage it is very important to understand that these cells have evolved to act as food storage pouches that will release calories in times of need i.e. a shortage of fodder.

The implications of this to finishing cattle is that even during short periods of food shortages for example on the days up to or on the day of slaughter these cells will deplete, and the beef will become tough and flavourless even if the cattle have reached their target slaughter weight. It is also important that a simple day of feed might not correct this it may take much longer therefore it is important to have steady daily gains right up to the day of slaughter.

This is best achieved by changing your paddock grazing on a regular and timely fashion.

**Cattle Stress** - Meat from stressed cattle is tough and flavourless as it causes muscle fibres to tense up and triggers a cascade of change in the chemistry of the beef.

The presence of Adrenaline forces muscles to tense up and severe long-term stress can leave beef only fit for the bin.

#### **Causes of stress in cattle -**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1) Fear            | 2) Pain                                     |
| 3) Injury          | 4) Unfamiliar surroundings                  |
| 5) Handling stress | 6) Social stress (position within the herd) |
| 7) Trucking stress | 8) Noise                                    |
| 9) Excitement      | 10) Bright lights                           |

**Nutritional stress** - It can be a very subtle diet problem that affects taste and tenderness.

Mineral and vitamin shortages. Care should be taken to keep all these factors to a minimum.

## Feed

We know without doubt we have a very unique product with a very distinctive flavour that will tolerate a wide variety of grass type because of the way they graze and process their food and still provide an excellent flavoursome and tender beef.

Irish Moiled Cattle raised within this 'traditional system' will only be fed grass or grass-based rations i.e. hay, silage unless for a period after weaning and in times when forage or silage quality is of poor quality. The health of the animal must always take priority over adhering to a strict grass-based system. Care should be taken to ensure the feed is of organic quality, brewers' grain would also be a sustainable alternative.

## Slaughter

The age of slaughter is not an exact science and should be judged on the information given above and by the stockman's judgement. I think the variation in stature and quality in the breed may still be a factor in this and will dictate the age, but I think this will improve as our breed improvement measures role out. I would envisage a target weight of about 270k to 290k for steers and 230k to 270k for heifers at about 28 – 30 months to be ideal and something to strive for. The reason for this is they produce too much of the surface fat that is of no use for flavour or tenderness if left to long.

On the subject of slaughter animals should be transported ideally in a trailer they are used with too the nearest high-quality small abattoir mixing with other cattle should be avoided at this point to avoid stress.

**Hanging** - Beef hung in a commercial fridge in daily use will only tolerate about 14 days for the forequarters and about 21 days for the rest this could be lengthened by better ageing facilities and may improve tenderness and flavour we would recommend 31 days.