



Beef Cattle Boosting Beef Production Efficiency Ian Houston



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Key outcomes of feed advice

- Reduced age at finishing
- Less methane emissions and increased sustainability
- Increased cash flow and profitability

Background and area of expertise

SAC graduate Ian Houston worked for Smiths Gore before moving to farmers' co-operative, Tarff Valley Ltd. He provides technical information and advice to farmers, and supports the sales team. Ian advises in many situations: intensive dairy, beef finishing, extensive suckler cows, and hill sheep.

Give an example of how your feed advice has made a measurable difference

In one suckler beef herd, finishing all progeny on farm, a feed policy change improved performance. Traditionally 150 commercial beef cows were mated to Charolais bulls, calving mid-March with calves offered creep feed based on home-grown rolled barley from August. Calves were weaned at nine months and put onto store rations, then summered on minimal grazing with access to silage and concentrates. Most were housed for a second winter with 100 days of intensive feeding and finished from 18 to 24 months.

In year one crude protein and DUP (Digestible Undegradable Protein) levels were altered to improve daily liveweight gain (DLWG) and early frame growth, followed by sustained detailed ration formulation during growing

and finishing. Cattle were finished inside at 16 to 19 months.

Average slaughter age reduced from 21 to 17.5 months, carcass weight stayed the same at 350kg, concentrates/head reduced from 1.3 to 1.25 tonnes, and DLWG increased 0.2 kg. Growth rates increased 22% without additional concentrates, reducing time to slaughter by 100 days, effectively reducing methane emissions.

By finishing inside, more grazing became available and cows have been increased to 200. This has improved cashflow and gross margins, and spread fixed costs, with a significant increase in the weight and value of finished beef per hectare, and better sustainability.

What difference does FAR make to you and to your customers?

FAR has given advisers a recognised status, reassuring farmers that members have obtained relevant training, and display the required standard of knowledge. It draws attention to the environmental impact of non-efficient farming practices. By providing sound advice, backed by up-to-date information, we can help ensure our clients and UK agriculture has a profitable and environmentally-friendly future.