

Innovations in integrated feeding systems and marketing chains for suckled calves

A group of 16 suckled calf and beef producers attended farms in Yorkshire on the 13th and 14th February. This trip was delivered by CAFRE Advisers and funded through the Farm Innovation Visit Scheme, part of the NI Rural Development Programme which is part funded by the EU by CAFRE.

The aim of this excursion was to look at a business model of contract finishing beef cattle as well as identifying measures which could be taken to improve feed efficiencies when producing and finishing beef cattle. The farmers who attended the visits will disseminate share their findings to other farmers in N Ireland.

Visit to Doug Dear's Contract finishing business near Selby,

Yorkshire.Farm facts

- Contract beef finishing unit.
- Finishing 2,000 head/annually.
- 40 clients supplying cattle to feedlot annually.
- 1,000 acre arable unit supplying 80% of feed used

Farm Visit Innovation Overview Doug Dear operates an intensive beef finishing unit with a difference on the outskirts of Selby, Yorkshire. Rather than purchasing cattle for finishing, where large sums of capital are tied up in livestock, Doug runs a contract finishing enterprise whereby he basically provides a bed and breakfast arrangement for a set fee. Under the arrangement, farmers transfer cattle on to the Doug's farm, while still retaining ownership of the animals.

Doug provides feed, housing and labour as well as booking cattle for slaughter and haulage to the abattoir. From arrival on farm, cattle steers and heifers are intensively finished over a 60-90 day finishing period, with young bulls being fed for 150 days. Once the finishing period is complete, cattle move to slaughter with payment issued directly to the owner from the processor.

The cattle owners are invoiced monthly by Doug to cover feed and labour costs incurred during the finishing period on farm. Around 2,000 cattle are finished annually on farm and supplied by 40 clients from across the UK, with the current system now in operation for a decade. Prior to this, Doug was purchasing dairy bred cattle for finishing. However, he decided to cease the enterprise due to repeatedly low margins being returned on his investment.