Buying in cattle

Perhaps the simplest and best way of preventing problems with bought-in cattle is not to buy-in – but there are very few truly "closed" herds in Ireland. For various reasons (expansion, replacement, improved genetics, etc), animals are often purchased.

It is important to health-check and quarantine all animals which enter your herd.

Before you buy

Heifers (pregnant or maiden) are less of a risk of being disease carriers than mature cows – this applies to both viruses and bacteria.

Don't buy any animal the week before you need them. Aim for buying at least one month before you need to introduce them to the main herd.

It is preferable to buy multiple animals from a single source rather than single animals from multiple sources.

Think about the timing of buying-in.
At what times are there the most susceptible animals (pregnant heifers, newborn calves, etc) in your herd? Avoid buying-in at these times.

Ask the vendor questions about animal health……

What vaccines (if any) have been given?

When were they given?

Does the herd of origin have a BVD/IBR/Johnes management programme in place?

Is there any certification of such?

Remember cattle can pick up disease during transport from one clean farm to another clean farm.

Check the lorry when they arrive.

Are your cattle the only ones on board?

Does the shipper have a hygiene/disease control scheme?

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Quarantine

Operating a true quarantine requires huge commitment and effort. Ideally separate housing, feeding, and calving areas should be used for "home" versus "quarantined" cattle. However an absolute minimum, to make any meaningful difference, is that contact between the two groups of cattle is prevented.

Your quarantine area is for newly-introduced stock and should **NOT** be your sick bay for other stock. Both should be kept well separated from each other and the main breeding herd.

Pay particular attention to keeping your breeding herd separate from the quarantine.
You, and only you, can protect them.

Talk to your vet about how best to implement a workable quarantine on your farm.

Cattle should be quarantined for at least one month before you introduce them to the main herd.

Quarantine all animals returning from shows, marts, and sales.

Pregnant bought-in animals should remain separated from the main herd until BOTH the dam and calf have been tested as negative for BVD virus. Ask your vet to explain why this is important.

All animals should be observed daily for any clinical signs of disease and any such evidence of disease should prompt immediate action. If in doubt, check their temperatures.

For prevention of respiratory diseases, particularly in weanlings, "home " and " quarantined" cattle cannot share the same air space.

Any manure or run-off from the isolated cattle cannot come into contact with any animals from the main herd.

If lameness is a concern in your herd, use a foot-bath initially on bought-ins.

Ideally aim for groups of animals to enter and leave quarantine all at once. Buying and adding cattle in dribs and drabs becomes impossible to manage. Adopt an all-in, all-out policy.

Always milk, feed and muck out bought-in, quarantined cattle after the main herd.

Disinfect all boots in foot-baths after leaving the quarantine.

It makes sense to treat for internal (worms, fluke) and external (lice, ringworm) parasites now. This is also a good time for vaccination and to allow adjustment to any new feeding regime.

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Testing

Test each animal 2-3 weeks after its arrival in your quarantine – if it is carrying an infection you want to know as soon as possible. Test before or on the day you vaccinate.

If using embryo transfer, test both the recipients and the donor before you do the procedure. Hundreds or indeed thousands of euros may be wasted if you are unlucky enough to use animals infected with BVD or IBR.

A single clotted blood sample can be used to test for:

BVD virus – to test if the animal is a PI animal and therefore unsuitable for breeding.

BVD antibody – to test the level of antibody to BVD virus. Antibody generally indicates immunity to the virus. If the result is negative, talk to your vet about whether or not BVD vaccination is warranted.

IBR antibody (gB) – to test the level of antibody to IBR virus. Antibody generally indicates a potential IBR carrier [LINK]. Once infected with IBR, animals remain so for life and are potential shedders of the virus when stressed. Cows can come under stress at calving, at peak lactation, at weaning, etc. If the result is positive, be sure about the animal's vaccination history and talk to your vet about IBR control in your herd. If the result is negative, talk to your vet about whether or not IBR vaccination is warranted.

The same blood sample can be used to test for **Johnes Disease** and **Leptosporosis**. It makes good sense to get your new animals tested for these diseases before they enter the herd proper.

Ask your vet to send all samples to the CVRL or your local RVL, with a clearly completed submission form.

WAIT until you get the results before introducing the bought-in quarantined animals to the main herd – assume nothing.