

The cost of keeping a barren cow

Which is the best option –

- To keep a barren cow unproductive for 12 months (with a high risk that she will be barren again in 2 or 3 years time) or
- Cull and replace her.

The average annual variable costs per cow of keeping a barren cow unproductive for 12 months has been recorded at £217. The potential options of replacing the barren cow are –

- A bulling heifer to be mated next summer or
- A incalf heifer to calve next spring.

Bulling Heifer

For simplicity we have assumed that the cost of keeping the bulling heifer over the next year will be similar to the annual cost of keeping a mature barren cow – although the bulling heifer will eat less she will need a higher proportion of concentrates in her ration. The financial advantage/disadvantage will therefore depend on the purchase price for a bulling heifer at around 300 kg this autumn and the value of the cull cow at around 600 kg. If the cull sells for 90p per kg then the breakeven purchase price of the bulling heifer would be 180p per kg.

Incalf Heifer

Again assuming the cost of keeping the incalf heifer will be similar to the cost of keeping the barren cow then the advantages and disadvantages would be –

Additional Income		Additional Costs	
Cull cow	£600	Calf feed	£50
Weaned calf 250 kg @ 150p	£375	Purchase incalf heifer	£?
	£975		

The figures used in the table would suggest that the breakeven price for purchasing an incalf heifer would be around £925. This suggests the best option would be replacing barren cows with younger bulling heifers. People breeding their own heifer replacements may be tempted to simply transfer the breeding heifer or even an incalf heifer at their book value. However this will mean there is zero profit from the heifer rearing enterprise. Heifer should be transferred at their market value, the same as feed barley is costed at market price rather than just the price of production.

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