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Developing a low cost DIY weight recording model for beef cows and calves in Ireland

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The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) was launched in January 2019. Funding of 20 million euro was made available by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in Ireland for the pilot which aims to capture on-farm liveweights of approx. 500,000 cows and their calves. The farmer is to be paid €40 for each cow/calf combination weighed. To satisfy the terms of the pilot the farmer is required to weigh the cow and calf on the same day and submit the weights to ICBF via paper, website or app. For farmers who don't have access to weighing equipment a low-cost convenient DIY weight recording model had to be developed to ensure the farmer had access to equipment while maximising the amount of the payment going to the farmer.

Funding was provided to purchase 400 sets of scales and these were made available for farmers to rent at a daily rate of

€50. A nationwide network of depots was established in order to provide the rental service to as many farmers as possible. The DIY works as follows

- The farmer books the scales online using specifically designed booking software.
- The equipment is collected from the depot.
- The farmer weighs the animals.
- The equipment is returned to the depot.

A tender process was required to purchase the weighing equipment and appoint a service provider to run the rental scheme. Some of the challenges that had to overcome were education around the importance of biosecurity, rollout of the equipment to the various depots and ensuring that the rental model operated efficiently.