

NEWS RELEASE



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FARMING FORUM IN GROUND-BREAKING AGREEMENT OVER FUTURE OF MALE DAIRY CALVES

An influential forum of UK beef and dairy organisations, retailers and animal welfarists is backing a set of potentially far-reaching aims in a bid to solve the problem of the dairy industry's black and white male dairy calves.

The members* of the Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum, established in June 2006 after an initiative by Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA, have agreed a report that aims to support and encourage the development of economically viable outlets for the domestic rearing and finishing of male dairy calves.

Until now, many of the black and white male dairy calves have been considered unsuitable for beef production: as a result, many of the 482, 000 born in the UK each year are either killed soon after birth or exported to continental veal farms, where they may be kept in group rearing systems that do not meet UK standards.

In their new report, which follows 18 months of intense research and debate, forum members have agreed to support and encourage:

- ■ The development of economically viable outlets for the domestic rearing and finishing of male dairy calves
- ■ The development of technical and breeding improvements that may reduce the number of male dairy calves born and/or improve calf quality
- ■ High welfare standards for calf rearing in the UK and other EU member states.

They have also pledged to promote and develop UK and export market opportunities for home-produced beef and to encourage consumers to buy welfare-friendly British beef.

The intention is that the forum's agreement should lead to significant changes in dairy and beef farming practices that, when translated into specific proposals by individual stakeholders, are likely to create a sea-change in attitudes to male dairy calves.

There is more than enough capacity for the meat of male dairy calves to be absorbed into the British beef market: the forum describes their export and on-farm slaughter shortly after birth as "wasting a valuable resource to the British beef industry that has the potential, given appropriate market conditions, to directly increase farm incomes and inject more work into the economy."

Forum stakeholders will now be working within their sectors of the farming and food industry to try to implement the forum's recommendations, ahead of a meeting to be held in June 2008 at which they will report on their progress.

* The forum includes representatives from: Assured British Meat, Assured Dairy Farms (ADF), Beef Production Systems Ltd, Blade Farming Ltd, Bristol University, British Friesian Breeders Club, British Cattle Veterinary Association, Centre for Dairy Information (CDI), Cattle Information Service (CIS), Compassion in World Farming, Co-operative Group, Cranfield University, Defra, Dovecote Park Ltd, Dunbia, English Beef and Lamb Executive (EBLEX), Food Animal Initiative (FAI), Freedom Food, Helen Browning Organics, Holstein UK, Marks & Spencer, McDonald's, Milk Development Council (MDC), National Beef Association (NBA), National Farmers' Union (NFU), National Farmers' Union Scotland (NFUS), Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative (OMSCo), Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF), RSPCA, Sainsbury's, Scottish Agricultural College, Soil Association, Southern Counties Fresh Foods, Tesco, Trading Standards Institute (TSI), Waitrose, Westpoint Veterinary Group.

A selection of quotes from participants in the Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum can be found below.

For more information, please contact the RSPCA press office on 0300 123 0244/0288 (Out of hours: 0870 0555 500 & ask for pager number 828 825) or CIWF press office on 01483 521973 (Out of hours: 07771 926005).

Editors' Notes

Facts and figures about dairy calves in the UK

The British beef industry is only 75 per cent self sufficient in beef and needs to import at least 250,000 tonnes of beef a year, much of it of manufacturing quality from the Republic of Ireland to meet consumption of over one million tonnes.

In the years leading up to the lifting of the export ban in May 2006 an estimated 250,000 – 350,000 per annum (44% to 61%) were killed soon after birth because they were considered to be worthless. With the lifting of the export ban these animals once again had a market value.

About the Forum

The Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum was convened by the RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming and other leading stakeholders in June 2006. Its aim was to find realistic and economically viable alternatives that would result in a reduction in the number of male dairy calves killed shortly after birth and the number that are exported live to veal farms.

Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum Quotes

Blade Farming Ltd/Southern Counties Fresh Foods Ltd

Richard Phelps, Managing Director: "We are one of the dairy farmer's largest customers for black and white calves and handle large volumes for beef production. The UK is not self sufficient in beef and these calves are valuable to industry.

"Blade Farming has a unique supply chain and finishes calves from different types of dairy bred cattle. More recently we began working with Tesco on a UK rose veal system, which has really helped dairy farmers find an alternative market to live exports.

"We are delighted we can work with dairy farmers and retailers to find alternatives to live exports."

British Friesian Breeders Club

"The British Friesian Breeders Club recognises the substantial contribution that CIWF and RSPCA have made in bringing together the main players in the food chain, in order to develop a route by which more dairy bull calves are retained for the home market, through their greater suitability for finishing. The Club looks forward to playing its part in the supply of suitable breeding alternatives, to ensure these quality calves."

Compassion in World Farming

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive: "This collaborative approach to improving animal welfare is truly ground breaking. We hope that these measures will now be implemented by all stakeholders so that we can move beyond calf exports and bring lasting and mutual benefits to animal welfare and industry alike."

Eastbrook Farm (Helen Browning's Totally Organic)

Helen Browning: "We can only safeguard calves from export or on farm culling, if people will buy humanely produced veal or young beef from these dairy breeds. Our trial with Tesco is really vital to establish whether customers will enjoy this delicious meat. If sales are satisfactory, we will then be able to work with other organic farmers to build up the supply to make rosé veal more widely available."

Holstein UK

"Holstein UK supports the need for the development of a home market for dairy bull calves. It must be remembered that farmers at least have a market through export, and it must be understood that if this is to be prevented, and more dairy bull calves reared, it is critical that an economically viable alternative rearing, finishing and most importantly market for dairy bull calves must be established. Farmers cannot carry the cost of rearing and finishing animals at a financial loss and with major retailers importing a percentage of their beef, there is room for expansion of our home, quality produced product."

Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services

Cllr Geoffrey Theobald OBE, Chairman of LACORS: "We wholeheartedly support the development of economically viable outlets within the UK for the half a million male calves that are either killed soon after birth or exported to continental veal farms every year.

"Not only would this promote the welfare of these animals but it would also help further develop the UK farming industry and strengthen the local communities and economies which rely heavily on agriculture for their continued success. Such steps would also provide further sources of local, sustainable produce."

Marks & Spencer

Rob Cumine, Marks & Spencer Agricultural Manager: "Marks & Spencer welcomed the opportunity to take part in the *Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum* that seeks to address the complex animal welfare issues associated with milk production and dairy bull calves in the UK.

"We understand to really deal with the problem it starts with retailers taking responsibility for what happens on the farms that supply them".

"That's why in 1999 we established a dedicated pool of dairy farmers and in 2003 we launched our Milk Pledge contact, offering a fixed price for minimum of 6 months to all M&S dairy farmers. Last year we invested £250,000 in a unique computer system to monitor dairy cow health and welfare on all our farms and in October announced that we would stop selling imported white veal. We are currently working with our farmers to develop a Rosé Veal supply for 2008."

McDonald's

"McDonald's is proud of their long term commitment in supporting British farming and strong track record in improving animal welfare standards. McDonald's is pleased to continue these commitments through their support of the Beyond Beef Exports Stakeholders Forum. McDonald's takes its role as a responsible customer seriously and hopes the recommendations of the Forum will lead to improved animal welfare standards for male dairy calves within an economically viable framework."

National Beef Association

"At present the UK beef industry is only 77 per cent self sufficient and imports over 300,000 tonnes of beef each year to make up the gap between production and consumption.

If 150,000 -200,000 Holstein bull calves are reared within the UK each year instead of either being killed at birth, or exported to veal rearing units in other EU countries, it would increase domestic production by 65,000-75,000 tonnes and help to prevent the price of other domestic beef animals being undercut by discounted imports from countries whose production standards are often lower than our own."

National Farmers' Union (NFU)

Peter Kendall, President of the NFU: "We are delighted to be able to support this initiative to develop value added markets and systems for dairy bred calves.

"We have always argued that unilateral trade bans on welfare grounds are invariably counter-productive, because they shift a problem somewhere else, possibly making it even worse, rather than offering a genuine solution.

"The key to reducing calf exports is to develop markets that will mean that the calves are worth more at home than they would be abroad. That way, everyone wins, including the calves themselves."

Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative (OMSCo)

"OMSCo is very pleased to be a part of this initiative, which aims to tackle a difficult but important issue for the dairy industry."

Huw Bowles, OMSCo's Chief Operating Officer said "The Forum has already led to the initiation of a number of projects which will improve the plight of male dairy calves and we are confident that further improvements will take place as a result of the work of the group."

Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)

RABDF chairman, Lyndon Edwards: "We welcome this initiative to find a home market for dairy bull calves. If it becomes really successful, eventually there may no longer be any calves available for export. In fact, dairy farmers

would be much happier if they could rear all their calves to produce prime British beef. The practice of having no alternative but to put them down is one of the most depressing aspects of a farmer's life."

RSPCA

David Bowles, Head of External Affairs for the RSPCA: "This report is a major milestone in the work to find alternative outlets for excess male calves. The RSPCA helped to found the Calf Forum because a solution to the welfare problems has to work for farmers and supermarkets, if it's going to stick. The Calf Forum gives us our best shot ever because of the wide range of knowledge and expertise involved.

"The live veal export trade is fraught with risks for these very young animals. Scientific research shows that long distance transport can have serious negative effects on calves and the sea crossing adds to the problems they face. At the end of the journey, many veal rearing systems on the continent simply don't satisfy calves' welfare needs and indeed would be illegal in Britain."

Sainsbury's

"Sainsbury's have been members of the Forum since June 06 when it was first convened, and support the forum's aims to increase the opportunities for using dairy bred male calves in the UK beef and veal supply chains thereby reducing the need to export live calves to the continent".

Soil Association

Phil Stocker, Head of Food and Farming: "The Soil Association is delighted to be involved in the Forum. We are determined to help find ethical solutions for calves and to support all those who are working towards this end."

Tesco

Michelle Waterman, Agriculture Manager: "Tesco's commitment to farm animal welfare has been demonstrated by our participation in the *Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum*. We hope that our new initiative will set an example of what can be done. As we've just announced 930 dairy farmers supplying milk to Tesco have agreed they will no longer export dairy calves. Instead the calves will be used to supply British beef and British veal to shoppers.

"Tesco has developed a fully integrated system that links dairy and beef producers to make it easier for the calves to enter the UKbeef supply chain. We know that the live export of calves to the Continent is a highly emotive subject for customers. This is an important welfare issue and independent research shows that the majority of shoppers want this practice to end. We

are proud of our record on welfare and are pleased to be taking this important step."

Trading Standards Institute

"The Trading Standards Institute has been delighted to have been involved in this initiative, which has brought together the main parties involved in the United Kingdom livestock industry, ranging from producers to welfare organisations. The Forum has come up with a positive solution to a problem that has been a matter of concern for a number of years. It should now ensure that a sustainable market can be found for male calves in the UK. Trading Standards Officers are responsible for the enforcement of legislation relating to the welfare of animals being transported and those on farm premises; we welcome any initiative that will reduce the possibility of non compliance and to ensure that the welfare of the calves is the highest priority. The Trading Standards Institute would like to extend thanks to Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA for facilitating the forum."

Waitrose

"Waitrose welcomes the findings of the Beyond Calf Export Stakeholders Forum. We have already launched a scheme with the long term aim of ensuring that every surplus dairy calf produced on its dairy farms has a useful purpose with the UK beef market. The project will aim to ensure that surplus calves from Waitrose's standard and organic milk producer groups can be reared for beef within a fully integrated supply chain – having useful lives within the UK .

"We are also working with our dairy farmers to look at breeding a more 'sustainable' dairy cow where the male calves could be more suitable for beef production and are exploring the possibility of using sexed semen as a tool to reduce the number of surplus dairy bull calves."

Westpoint Veterinary Group Ltd

"Replacement heifers are valuable but dairy bulls should also have a future – there is nothing worse than seeing apparently healthy animals destroyed due to the lack of a viable market," says vet Rob Drysdale from Westpoint Veterinary Group. "Westpoint believes the industry must and will improve: the Beyond Calf Export Forum will help guide these changes.

"Calves from the dairy herd present a viable option for beef producers in the future as the UK beef herd contracts. Linking the supply chain between dairy farmer, calf rearer and the beef finisher does work and this model can be expanded to meet further beef needs. Westpoint vets are already involved in this process working with its own dairy herds producing some 25,000 calves annually, Blade Farming SW with over 17,000 calves reared this year and as consultants to one of the major retailers.

“As one of the largest farm animal practices in the UK, Westpoint is proud to have been involved in helping produce this report. The practice knows that high welfare and best practice are at the heart of profitable beef production.”

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