

NEWS RELEASE



20 May 2008

Compassion in World Farming
Tel: +44 (0) 1483 521 970
+44 (0) 7771 926005

UK beef production set to nose-dive unless immediate action is taken to rear dairy bull calves, experts warn

Production of UK beef is set to plummet by nearly a fifth next year warns Compassion in World Farming, the RSPCA and experts from the influential Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum*.

Production is expected to fall by almost 20 per cent virtually overnight from June 2009 leading to a significant under-supply unless the industry immediately starts rearing more Holstein dairy calves for beef.

Animal welfare groups Compassion in World Farming and RSPCA say that the solution lies in making better use of male dairy calves that are either killed on the farm or exported to continental veal units.

The alarming fall in beef production is being triggered by a surge in Holstein inseminations in the dairy herd which was sparked by the European Commission's plans to remove milk quota restraints by 2015.

Dairy farmers responded to Commission moves last autumn by breeding more milk producing calves with the result that around 350,000 fewer beef cross steers and heifers are expected to be born to dairy cows each year from next month (June 2008) onwards.

And this means that from June 2009 around 350,000 fewer beef cross cattle, which currently account for more than half of UK production, will be processed and national beef output could

fall by as much as 18-19 per cent unless the missing dairy cross calves are replaced by purebred Holstein bulls and steers.

Retailers are unlikely to be able to fill the gap by using beef imports because the high value of the euro is diverting more Irish beef onto EU markets. Meanwhile, imports from South America - the main source of non-EU origin beef - have slowed to a trickle since Brazil failed to meet the European Commission's trading conditions and the Argentine government continues its restrictions on beef exports.

It is estimated that since September last year around 80 per cent of dairy herd inseminations have come from the Holstein bull as dairy farmers respond to the opportunity to increase production. The more usual range is 40-60 per cent depending on dairy heifer availability with the 60-40 per cent balance coming from beef bull insemination using Continental, Angus, or Hereford breeds.

The most recent industry figures suggest that even before the surge in Holstein inseminations last autumn around 480,000 Holstein bull calves were routinely born each year but fewer than 230,000 were reared for beef in the UK.

Robert Forster, a beef industry specialist working with the Beyond Calf Exports Forum says: "Maintenance of domestic beef supply at 2007-2008 levels will depend entirely on whether additional Holstein bulls are used by the industry to replace conventional beef cross calves that are no longer being bred because of the surge in purebred dairy inseminations."

"However the signals are not good because UK beef purchasers have a habit of either rejecting, or under-appreciating, beef from Holstein bulls."

"Over the past year the number of Holstein bull calves reared for beef may have hit a low of 120,000 head, because high cereal costs combined with the persistent carcass discount faced by finishers who are being offered no incentive to transform a dairy industry by-product into a valuable beef animal."

"Short supplies can be avoided if beef retailers immediately invest in new supply chains that encourage British dairy farmers to offer their Holstein bulls to the beef sector and at the same

time gives specialist beef calf rearers and finishers an incentive to increase Holstein bull beef production.”

For Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA, investing in male born dairy calves would solve a long-standing animal welfare issue. Exporting calves as young as two weeks old causes untold stress and suffering. A recent investigation by Compassion in World Farming found that some calves are traveling up to 100-hour journeys to continental veal farms to be reared in systems that may not meet UK standards.

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming said: “Not only would incorporating Holstein bulls into the beef supply chain solve impending shortages, it would also reduce live calf exports and serious animal welfare issues and avoid the price hikes that consumers are likely to face if no action is taken.

“Male dairy calves have been treated as wastage for far too long and this solution offers an opportunity for change. Let’s take it.”

David Bowles, RSPCA Head of External Affairs said...

“This is a big win-win opportunity. Farmers and supermarkets can head off potential beef supply problems, consumers get a good deal and – best of all – it could end the serious welfare problems of transporting very young calves abroad. The live veal export trade is fraught with risks for these very young animals. They suffer stress when they come from all over the country to be mixed up into one load to be transported abroad.

“They can then be in transit for nine hours before being allowed a break of just one hour for food and/or water, followed by another nine or more hours on the road.

“The RSPCA helped to found the Calf Forum because a solution to the welfare problems has to work for everyone if it’s going to stick.”

Notes to the Editor

*The Calf Forum, an initiative of Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA, comprises members of the beef and dairy industry, government, retailers and welfare organisations is calling for the establishment of economically viable supply chains for home-rearing of male dairy calves for beef.

For further information or interviews contact:

Compassion in World Farming press office, Annabel Davis or Emily Durrant on 01483 521973/2, or Annabel@ciwf.org or Emily@ciwf.org or 07771 926005 (out of office hours).

RSPCA Press office is 0300 123 0244/0288. Out of hours, the duty press officer can be contacted by calling 0870 0555 500 and asking for pager number 828825.