

BEYOND CALF EXPORTS STAKEHOLDERS FORUM

Report on Conclusions & Recommendations

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Published January 2008

The success of the Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum will be measured by:

- an increased uptake of male dairy calves into the UK beef chain
- a reduction in calves killed on farm
- a reduction in live exports of calves for further fattening.

To achieve this we will need to:

- work to support and encourage the development of economically viable outlets for the domestic rearing and finishing of male dairy calves
- work to raise awareness, to identify and develop potential domestic and export market opportunities for home produced beef from male dairy calves
- support and encourage technical and breeding developments to assist dairy farmers wishing either to reduce the number of male dairy calves born on their farms or to improve the quality of calves that are presented to market
- support and encourage high welfare standards within calf rearing systems both domestically and in other EU member states
- support and encourage consumers to purchase welfare-friendly British beef.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2006, Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA convened the **Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum** with leading stakeholders to find realistic and economically viable solutions that would result in a greater number of male dairy calves being reared in the UK to meet the demand for beef on domestic and international markets.

The Forum comprises UK beef and dairy industry bodies and organisations, retailers, Defra, leading academics and animal welfarists. It has now agreed potentially far-reaching proposals that it hopes will bring about a sea-change in attitudes towards male dairy calves. The guiding principle of the Forum has been that the alternatives developed need to benefit the UK beef and dairy industry as well as boosting calf welfare.

Approximately 482,000 male black and white dairy calves are born in the UK per annum. Their beef producing qualities such as conformation has not generally been considered suitable for beef production, despite there being more than enough capacity to absorb the meat from these calves into the British beef market. As a result, many of these calves are either killed soon after birth or exported to continental veal farms where they may be kept in rearing systems that do not meet UK standards because the groups of calves are housed on slatted floors with no bedding.

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 had no market value. In May 2006, when the live export ban was lifted, these animals once again had a market value¹.

The Forum is seeking to make breeders, rearers, processors and retailers aware of the advantages of drawing more male dairy calves into the UK's beef systems and of allowing them to make a direct contribution to increases in UK farm income and to create more work for the UK economy. This can be done by encouraging more dairy farmers to offer more calves to domestic buyers so that more of these calves are reared, either as steers or bulls, and finished and processed within the UK.

The Forum recognises that current market conditions are unfavourable for such an endeavour but considers that its task is to promote a framework for the industry so that it can respond to future opportunities. The Forum appreciates that dairy farmers cannot afford to rear male dairy calves unless there is a viable outlet for them.

The Forum has carried out extensive research and developed advice and proposals that it wishes to recommend to all sectors of the UK dairy and beef industry as well as to processors, retailers and consumers. It is recognised that government also has a valuable role to play.

The Forum hopes that its work will lead to action by farmers, industry bodies, milk and beef processors, retailers, welfare assurance bodies, animal welfare organisations and consumers that will result in:

- an increased uptake of male dairy calves into the UK beef chain
- a reduction in calves killed on farm using information from the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) and in Northern Ireland, the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS)
- a reduction in live exports using information from the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) or its successor bodies, Defra and in Northern Ireland, the Livestock and Meat Commission.

¹In 2006 the estimated total number of male dairy calves of all breeds born in England, Scotland and Wales was 438,000 of which an estimated 299,400 were registered with the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) and an estimated 138,700 killed on farm. Of those killed on farm – almost 115,000 were black and whites, and almost 24,000 were Dairy Shorthorn, Ayrshire, Jersey and Guernsey.

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- support and encourage technical and breeding developments to assist dairy farmers wishing either to reduce the number of male dairy calves born on their farms or to improve the quality of calves that are presented to market
- support and encourage high welfare standards within calf rearing systems both domestically and in other EU member states
- support and encourage consumers to purchase welfare-friendly British beef.

The Forum includes representatives from Assured British Meat, Assured Dairy Farms (ADF), Beef Production Systems Ltd, Blade Farming, 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 Co operative (OMSCo), Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), Sainsbury's, Scottish Agricultural College, Soil Association, Southern Counties Fresh Foods, Tesco, Trading Standards Institute (TSI), Waitrose and Westpoint Veterinary Group.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASING THE NUMBER OF MALE DAIRY CALVES IN THE UK BEEF SUPPLY CHAIN

1. The Forum considers that the killing and export of male dairy calves is a waste of a valuable resource to the British beef industry. Rearing these calves has the potential, given appropriate market conditions, to directly increase farm incomes and inject more work into the economy. Every effort should be made to ensure that this resource is not wasted but used to displace beef imports.
2. The British beef industry is only 77 per cent self sufficient and imports some 300,000 tonnes of beef a year, much of it of manufacturing quality from the Republic of Ireland to meet consumption of 1.115 million tonnes. It is quite clear that the UK beef market could easily absorb beef produced from all Holstein bulls produced on UK dairy farms – even in the unlikely event that all calves could be made available. Economists from the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) have advised the Forum that realistically the potential increase of the number of calves reared in the UK is probably in the order of 150,000 – 200,000 head. If the average carcass weight of a young bull is between 265 and 300kg, an additional 65-75,000 tonnes of beef would be produced each year in the most optimistic scenario. This volume of beef accounts for only 30 per cent of the gap between forecast domestic production and consumption in 2008 and the UK would still be far from being self-sufficient.
3. Beef from male dairy calves presents both a domestic and export market opportunity. The domestic market could easily absorb up to 70,000 tonnes of beef and the export market up to an additional 30,000 tonnes. Opportunities already exist to sell Holstein beef onto the EU market. There is strong demand from export markets, as the gap between overall EU production and consumption is widening (it is already in the region of 3-4 per cent). There is also a limited market for veal in the UK.
4. The UK slaughter industry has sufficient capacity to slaughter much more than the current annual production of male dairy calves. The additional slaughtering of 0.2 million dairy bulls or steers would increase total cattle slaughterings by 7 per cent. According to MLC Consulting, over capacity in the UK industry was about 30 per cent when last estimated in the period following foot and mouth disease in 2001. In general about 30 per cent more cattle could be slaughtered without the abattoir industry having to markedly change its practices.
5. There is a traditional view in the beef industry that carcasses from dairy breeds such as the Holstein are inferior to those from beef breeds such as the Aberdeen Angus or Hereford. This prejudice is based on the perception that: (1) the yield of saleable meat from the carcass is significantly less; (2) the cuts have a lower visual appeal (shape and colour); and (3) eating quality is inferior. Research in Britain and elsewhere in the world has generally shown this prejudice to be overstated. There have been several UK studies comparing Holstein carcasses with those from other breeds and breed crosses and the difference in saleable meat on average (at the same fat class) is between two and three per cent. The difference in carcass shape between Holsteins and beef breeds causes the muscles to be thinner, resulting in slightly longer and thinner sirloin steaks but the importance of this for consumers is likely to be small. There have been several studies comparing the eating quality of Holstein beef with that of other breeds, usually conducted in typical commercial carcasses with a range of fat content. Differences in eating quality overall are small and if anything, in favour, of Holsteins. Set against these negative perceptions is the inherently low fat level in the Holstein carcass, which causes the meat to have a higher nutritional value because concentrations of polyunsaturated fatty acids are high. There is potential for marketing Holstein beef as a differentiated product because of its healthy low-fat qualities. Further information appears in an independent scientific summary by Professor Jeff Wood, the University of Bristol on 'Carcass yield, meat quality and nutritional value of Holstein beef', that was produced for the Forum.
6. Efficient, viable supply chains are needed to deal with male dairy calves and to make calf rearing affordable for dairy farmers. More streamlined connection is needed between producers, processors and retailers to encourage more organised and structured systems. There are not enough specialist rearers at present although there could be if more large processors/retailers were prepared to offer fixed prices for black and white carcasses that met their specifications.

7. Farmers considering whether to rear and finish black and white male dairy calves as steers or bulls for beef or to rear calves for veal should ensure that they have identified a market. Examples of models for conventional rearing and finishing have been provided by Waitrose/Dovecote Park, Dunbia and Blade Farming. Blade Farming has also provided preliminary information and questions on a possible scheme for organic rearing. The models that farmers will choose will depend on their individual circumstances, their market and the economic conditions of the time.
8. Retailers have a key role to play and can develop outlets for calves and can encourage farmers not to export their calves but to make them available to British industry where their welfare can be assured.
9. Defra, Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Department for Agricultural Rural Development in Northern Ireland (DARDNI) have key roles to play in facilitating collaboration and working with industry to encourage the development of supply chains.
10. Consumers have a key role to play: they can purchase milk and meat from retailers/other outlets that guarantee a good life for male dairy calves. Retailers and animal welfare organisations have a responsibility to increase consumer awareness by providing information.
11. Animal welfare organisations as well as the beef and dairy industries have a key role to play in encouraging consumers to do the above, in an appropriate way.

BREEDING AND EDUCATION

12. The Forum supports the dairy industry's move towards longer-living, more sustainable cows. If cows last longer in the herd fewer heifer replacements will be needed providing more opportunities to cross with beef bulls.
13. A change of breed or move to dual-purpose cows might be the answer for some farmers. A more dual-purpose breed, such as the British Friesian, affords the opportunity to take the male offspring through to finishing and obtain a premium price, possibly direct to the consumer. Support and encouragement should be available for farmers wishing to improve the quality of their calves by breeding. The Milk Development Council (MDC) has commissioned a research project at the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) on the production and economic effects of increasing musculature in Holsteins to improve their conformation for beef production. The results of the project will be available next year.
14. Although good information is available to farmers when they are selecting bull semen, it is thought that too many decisions are made based on special offers and promotions by breeding companies. Both Holstein UK and the MDC have tools available to assist farmers.
15. The use of sexed semen for heifer replacements would free up more animals for crossing with beef and reduce the number of black and white male dairy calves. If the use of sexed semen were to increase, it would need to be made available from a wider variety of bulls and needs to be practically and economically viable.
16. Extending lactation length from 10 to 18 months could, in theory, reduce the number of unwanted calves. Moreover, there could be potential welfare benefits for the cows, since the risk of metabolic and other health problems is greatest in early lactation. So far however, attempts to achieve this by natural means (i.e.: without use of hormone injections) have been largely unsuccessful and it is unlikely to prove a practical solution in the near future.
17. Only 50% of dairy herds are officially milk recorded. Milk recording presents a vital tool and has a role to play in monitoring the development of a more robust cow with improved lifetime performance. The Forum recommends that all dairy farmers should milk record and recommends action on this issue from retailers and milk processors.

CALF HEALTH AND WELFARE

18. Good calf welfare promotes healthy calves that can best contribute to a profitable and sustainable dairy beef supply chain. The most important factor in calf health and welfare management is to ensure that calves receive sufficient good quality colostrum within six hours of birth. Colostrum intake is essential to protect the calf against infectious disease and poor intake can lead to scours, pneumonia, impaired growth and higher risk of mortality.
19. Other factors that may compromise the welfare of calves are: inappropriate feeding; housing; poor hygiene; and mixing of batches of calves in preparation for transport leading to increased risk of infection; inadequate arrangements for the transport and disposal of unwanted calves through markets; and also inappropriate methods of on-farm slaughter.

20. Dairy farmers should recognise that they owe a duty of care not only to the calves born on their farm but to the future purchasers of those animals – other farmers whose profits will be adversely affected if the calves they purchase have had their welfare compromised by inadequate care and attention and by receiving insufficient colostrum. The Forum calls for farmers to treat their male calves in the same way that they treat their heifer calves and for Defra, SEERAD, WAG and DARDNI vets to continue to carry out spot checks on the welfare of calves, including the effectiveness of procedures for ensuring adequate colostrum levels.
21. The aim of farmers and industry should be to promote the welfare of all calves through appropriate husbandry, whatever their sex, value or destination. The moral position is that every farmer should assume responsibility for the life-time welfare of all calves born on his, or her, farm. Information on calf welfare legislation was provided to the Forum by Defra.
22. Welfare assurance should apply to every animal on the farm, including male dairy calves, whether they are to be dispatched shortly after birth or registered and reared/sold. At present, the separate farm assurance protocols for milk and beef production omit the welfare of calves that may not contribute to either system. To draw attention to calves they should feature in a dedicated section in farm assurance standards. A move to whole-farm assurance would be beneficial.² The Forum recommends that by the end of 2008 welfare assurance schemes should be expanded to incorporate a protocol for bobby calves, calf rearing requirements and a specific calf section/standard and that whole farm assurance should be adopted by 2011.
23. There should be a requirement for dairy farmers to record what happens to calves (still birth, registered, unregistered or killed on farm. Farm assurance schemes should require dairy farmers as part of their health and welfare plan to record the outcome of all calvings, including numbers born, their sex, destiny or destination (if known) and, if killed on farm, the method used).
24. The bobby calf is defined as a male dairy calf that is killed shortly after birth for whatever reason rather than being reared. Male calves of extreme dairy type have traditionally been regarded as they have no market value. These animals may receive inadequate care and attention on the farm where they are born. The problem is not confined to black and white Holstein calves but also to other breeds. A high percentage of Ayrshire, Jersey and Guernsey male dairy calves are killed shortly after birth. Whilst the Forum's aim is to reduce the number of bobby calves, it wishes to recommend that welfare assurance schemes adopt protocols to ensure humane treatment and on-farm slaughter of these animals. Working with representatives from welfare assurance schemes and the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA), the Forum's welfare working group has developed a draft protocol that refers in particular to the recommendations of the HSA outlined in its leaflet TN 2 Humane Dispatch and Disposal of Infant Calves (<http://www.hsa.org.uk/TN2.pdf>).

THE FUTURE

The Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum will review the progress that has been made on these points at regular intervals, commencing at a plenary meeting to be held in June 2008.

²Whole farm assurance refers to inspections covering all cattle on the farm regardless of their output. At present a dairy inspection focuses on the milk producing animals (and milk production) and a beef inspection focuses on those animals that are going for beef production. Although both Associated British Meats and Assured Dairy Farms cover the welfare of calves and are nearly there with whole farm assurance on farms that are both beef and dairy assured, the focus is slightly biased towards the end product at present. A move to whole farm assurance is an opportunity to put more focus on calves and indeed other issues through a modular structure.

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Assured Dairy Farms (ADF)

Beef Production Systems Ltd

Blade Farming Limited

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 Co operative
(OMSCo)

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British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)

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of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

Sainsbury's

Scottish Agricultural College

Soil Association

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