

GB Dairy Calf Strategy 2020–2023



Progress to date

Approximately, 30% of calves born in the dairy herd are heifers to join the milking herd. Ninety-five per cent of the remaining calves are expected to be reared for beef, if suitable, or sold for rose-veal. There has been substantial progress over the years by farmers, milk buyers, retailers and calf rearers, to ensure more calves are utilised in the food chain.

The dairy industry is committed to rearing all calves with care and eliminate the practice of euthanasia of calves by 2023.¹

¹ Quality of life should always take precedence over lifespan



Introduction

The British dairy industry prides itself on being a pioneer in dairy cattle welfare; it is a top priority for the sector, and our farmers take the lead to develop and enforce the highest animal welfare standards on our farms.

The fate of dairy bull calves is not a secret; it is actually a key focus area within the industry. The rearing of bull calves for the beef market on farm remains high, and a number of industry initiatives continue to champion improvements in calf health, welfare and survival. There is still room for improvement and we will continue to challenge ourselves to keep progressing in these areas.



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The complex nature of the supply chain, involving a vast number of stakeholders within both the dairy and beef sectors, underpins the need for a coordinated strategy that prioritises collaboration, communication and industry-wide buy-in, to achieve the agreed commitment.

The strategy identifies where the potential and responsibility exist for further improvement throughout the supply chain. It is vital that the priorities and associated

actions satisfy customer expectations, prioritise animal welfare and remain profitable at every stage of the supply chain. Collaboration will be key to delivering against these priorities and will require a joined-up approach from everyone in the supply chain.

This resource highlights the top priorities and will be reviewed at appropriate intervals.



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Key  Short-term deliverable (1–2 years)
 Medium-term deliverable (2–4 years)

Priority	Aspiration	Actions	Coordinated by	By when
Rear all calves with care	All people working across the calf supply chain must deliver on their responsibilities for good calf health and welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rear dairy bull calves with as much care for welfare as other calves Dairy farmers and the wider supply chain to work together to achieve best practice to ensure all calves get the best start to life and are viable for the beef sector Milk purchasers commitment to encourage farmers to ensure that no healthy calf shall be euthanised on farm Minimise mortality through the use of best calf management and rearing protocols Work with training providers to offer vocational qualifications on calf rearing as part of apprenticeship programmes 		
Encourage responsible breeding strategies through farm assurance	Breed calves that are economically attractive to potential beef buyers/rearers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dairy farmers to demonstrate commitment to reduce the number of economically unviable calves through responsible breeding strategies Promote better breeding tools and techniques such as the use of sexed semen Maximise the use of beef cross-breeding in the dairy herd to increase the potential value of the resulting calves Encourage the recording of sire ID when registering a calf with BCMS 		
Better communication of market requirements	Better communication of the market requirements to ensure suitable beef animals are being produced for the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure calf specifications are known and communicated to dairy farmers so they can breed suitable calves for the beef supply chain Promote efficiency throughout the dairy and beef industry via benchmarking Encourage feedback from finishers to calf producers on the performance of their calves and their carcass weight and quality Milk purchasers commitment to support dairy farmers by working with the supply chain 	Supply chain	
Increase the number of biosecure routes for TB-affected herds	Through an industry-led forum with government participation, achieve an increase in the number of Approved Finishing Units (AFUs), Licensed Finishing Units (LFUs), alongside an increase in Isolation Units (IUs) to create robust supply chains in England and Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve uptake and use of AFUs and increase the number of suitable premises to set-up IUs Government policy on IS and AFU is driven by measures that will eventually lead to TB eradication. Units housing cattle from TB restricted herds must have biosecurity as their main protection against the spread of TB locally and must have operational and licencing conditions that reflect their primary role Government policy requires flexibility to determine, whether AFUs and IUs remain appropriate for areas with changing TB incident to protect the TB status of the local area IU are only applicable to a single keeper at any one time The forum needs to consider how AFUs can be set up that do not financially disadvantage TB restricted keepers in favour of the profitability of the unit 		
Supporting Britain's beef sector	Commitment from food businesses to support Britain's farmers to move away from euthanasia of dairy bred bull calves and back British beef	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A firm commitment to sourcing beef from the nations and regions of Britain Identify the opportunities within the foodservice sector to source more British beef Communicate plans for any new policies with suppliers, to allow them to plan ahead and phase in any changes Promote high welfare rose-veal/dairy bull beef, to increase demand 	Retailers, food service and processors	
Opening up new pathways and supply chain opportunities for dairy bred calves	Develop robust supply chains for high-quality, farm assured dairy beef and veal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration across supply chains to develop new opportunities for dairy and beef bred calves, linking milk and beef supply chains Encourage model supply chain contracts with agreed pricing, standards and requirements Encourage new entrants into dairy-beef calf rearing, explore the potential of grants for new entrants and expansion of established dairy beef farms Encourage dairy and beef farmer partnerships Update regulatory definition, to reduce the age where beef is classified as beef from 12 months to 8 months of age Identify new market outlets for British beef and explore the growth of alternative markets for 8- to 12-month-old cattle 	Supply chain	
Innovation and supporting R&D	Prioritise innovation and R&D, which will improve technical efficiency, reduce costs of production and retain positive consumer perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure practices and standards for calf management are underpinned by contemporary science and research Develop a process that helps farmers choose the most appropriate bull for their farming system or target market Develop outcome measurements for higher welfare assessment of calves Develop cost-effective penside tests to assess whether colostrum has been given and absorbed effectively Research best practice to optimise the cost-efficiency of sexed semen Develop a genetic index to help farmers make informed sire selection decisions Establish an improved traceability platform that will allow enhanced tracking and monitoring of health and welfare across the lifetime of the animal Track and monitor consumers' perception of dairy bull calves Research and develop innovative rearing and finishing systems with lower cost of production and potential environmental benefits 	Government and industry	

This strategy is supported by the following organisations:

ABP Beef
 Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA)
 Aldi UK & Ireland
 Arla
 Asda
 British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA)
 British Retail Consortium
 Buitelaar Production Ltd.
 Cogent
 Co-op Food
 DairyUK
 Dawn Meats
 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

First Milk
 Genus
 Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC)
 Lidl
 Marks & Spencer
 McDonald's
 Meadow Foods
 Meadow Quality
 Morrisons
 Muller
 National Beef Association (NBA)
 National Farmers Union Cymru
 National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)
 National Milk Records (NMR)
 National Youngstock Association
 Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)
 Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)

Red Tractor Assurance
 Royal Society for the Prevention for Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
 Ruminant Health and Welfare Group
 Sainsbury's
 SellMyLivestock
 Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS)
 Scottish Government
 Tesco
 University of Nottingham Ruminant Population Health Group
 Welsh Government
 Westpoint

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