

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 calvesDairy 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 sectorMilk purchasers commitment to encourage farmers to ensure that no healthy calf shall be euthanised on farmMinimise mortality through the use of best calf management and rearing protocolsWork with training providers to offer vocational qualifications on calf rearing as part of apprenticeship programmes	AHDB	
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 strategiesPromote better breeding tools and techniques such as the use of sexed semenMaximise the use of beef cross-breeding in the dairy herd to increase the potential value of the resulting calvesEncourage 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 chainPromote efficiency throughout the dairy and beef industry via benchmarkingEncourage feedback from finishers to calf producers on the performance of their calves and their carcase weight and qualityMilk 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 IUsGovernment 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 roleGovernment 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 areaIU are only applicable to a single keeper at any one timeThe 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 BritainIdentify the opportunities within the foodservice sector to source more British beefCommunicate plans for any new policies with suppliers, to allow them to plan ahead and phase in any changesPromote 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 chainsEncourage model supply chain contracts with agreed pricing, standards and requirementsEncourage new entrants into dairy-beef calf rearing, explore the potential of grants for new entrants and expansion of established dairy beef farmsEncourage dairy and beef farmer partnershipsUpdate regulatory definition, to reduce the age where beef is classified as beef from 12 months to 8 months of ageIdentify 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 researchDevelop a process that helps farmers choose the most appropriate bull for their farming system or target marketDevelop outcome measurements for higher welfare assessment of calvesDevelop cost-effective penside tests to assess whether colostrum has been given and absorbed effectivelyResearch best practice to optimise the cost-efficiency of sexed semenDevelop a genetic index to help farmers make informed sire selection decisionsEstablish an improved traceability platform that will allow enhanced tracking and monitoring of health and welfare across the lifetime of the animalTrack and monitor consumers' perception of dairy bull calvesResearch 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:

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Genus
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Meadow Quality
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