



# UK Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy

2023-2028



## Supporting organisations

### Chief veterinary officers support the RH&W Dairy Welfare Strategy

For many years, the UK has been renowned for high standards of animal welfare, but we must continue to strive for the highest level of health and welfare across our nations' dairy herds if we are to remain leaders.

Across the four devolved nations, we are in full support of the RH&W dairy welfare strategy and the six strategic goals identified.

It's heartening to see such support across the whole dairy supply chain for this five-year strategy and the ambition to push for implementing action through collaboration. To be able to evidence annually the progress made as an industry towards achieving the six welfare goals is of paramount importance. For the strategy to succeed, engagement across

all stakeholder groups will be needed as will the development of infrastructure to measure and record progress.

Higher welfare standards mean healthier animals which leads to a reduced need for antibiotic usage, increased efficiency and lower environmental impacts. All of these factors will help to ensure the dairy sector has a sustainable future.

**Dr Christine Middlemiss,**  
**UK Chief Veterinary Officer**

**Dr Richard Irvine,**  
**Wales Chief Veterinary Officer**

**Dr Sheila Voas,**  
**Scotland Chief Veterinary Officer**

**Dr Robert Huey,**  
**Northern Ireland Chief Veterinary Officer**

- AgriSearch
- Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)
- Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA)
- Animal Health NI
- Animal Health and Welfare Board England (AHWBE)
- Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
- ASDA
- Arla
- British Cattle Breeders Club (BCBC)
- British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA)
- British Veterinary Association (BVA)
- Cattle Information Service (CIS)
- CHeCS
- Cogent UK
- Co-op Food
- CVS Farm
- Dairy UK
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)
- First Milk
- Food Standards Agency (FSA)
- Genus
- Glanbia Cheese
- Innovation for Agriculture
- Lidl GB
- Livestock Auctioneers' Association (LAA)
- Meadow Quality
- Mona Dairy
- Morrisons
- MSD Animal Health
- Muller
- National Beef Association (NBA)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)
- National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)
- National Milk Records (NMR)
- National Sheep Association (NSA)
- National Office of Animal Health (NOAH)
- Quality Milk Management Services (QMMS)
- Red Tractor Assurance
- Animal & Plant Health Agency England (RASE)
- Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
- Sainsbury's
- Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS)
- Scottish Government
- Tesco
- Ulster farmers Union
- University of Nottingham
- VetPartners
- Veterinary Goat Society
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers
- XL Vets



## Our vision

### Our vision for dairy cattle welfare in the UK

By 2028, the UK can demonstrate, through a functioning evidence base, progress in tackling six key areas of dairy cattle welfare. Being able to provide evidence of progress will be instrumental in the UK maintaining its status amongst world leaders in dairy cattle welfare. The six key strategic goals are: thriving cows; healthy feet; comfortable cows; appropriately nourished cows; healthy udders; and positive welfare. To achieve these goals, the four nations' governments, assurance schemes, and the dairy supply chains should work together to support progress in these areas – and support, or contribute to, centralised data collection to demonstrate progress and prove attainment of standards.

### Why this vision?

The UK dairy industry has enjoyed a positive reputation for animal welfare. However, in rapidly evolving global markets, the UK must keep pace with competitors – especially exporting countries, who are now tackling reputational and welfare challenges. It is essential that the UK remains at the forefront of animal health and welfare innovation and practice.

Many of the increasing pressures and challenges which dairy farmers face offer opportunities to ensure our industry is fit for the future. Tackling key welfare issues, and ensuring dairy producers have the business resilience to keep delivering high standards, will help ensure a world-class reputation for the UK dairy industry to compete with other nations.





# The six strategic goals for the UK Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy 2023-2028

## Thriving cows

All dairy animals will be bred, reared and cared for to be robust and thrive in all systems, irrespective of system. High survivability and low levels of 'No Economic Value' losses (involuntary culling) are indicative of good underlying health (e.g. infectious disease), welfare, and management.

## Appropriately nourished cows

Dairy cows will maintain a healthy body condition score throughout the year and all stages of lactation. Good condition indicates whether nutritional requirements are being met, weather events are being mitigated, group size and cow flow are being managed, and stocking densities are appropriate. Body condition can also provide an indicator of the presence or absence of certain health conditions (e.g. metabolic diseases).

## Healthy udders

Udder health will continue to be improved, leading to a reduction in mastitis. Minimising mastitis reduces the incidence of a major health and welfare issue in the UK dairy herd and manages a significant cost in terms of lost production, treatment and replacement costs.

## Positive welfare

Dairy welfare practices will be advanced by moving towards 'positive welfare', through the provision of an environment that allows animals to exhibit normal behaviours such as curiosity and play, for example, through appropriate enrichment.

## Healthy Feet

Every farm will have a proactive lameness management plan in place to optimise foot health. Lameness is one of the most costly, yet preventable, welfare issues in the UK dairy herd.

## Comfortable cows

The comfort of cows in housing and at pasture will be maximised by providing a clean and harm-free environment where they can lie, walk confidently and access environments such as shade, shelter or the outdoors as they wish. Facilities should allow for positive group dynamics and motivations to access different environments at will.



## Defining animal welfare

Animal welfare relates to an animal's physical health and ability to show natural behaviours – this is largely influenced by the six key goals identified in this strategy.

Health is a pivotal part of overall welfare. However it is also increasingly recognised that optimising cow welfare involves other important factors in addition to health such as welfare in transport and end of life care. Research shows that the public expects the delivery of good welfare to include far more than ensuring good health alone, and UK dairy farmers are in a good position to deliver on both.



## The opportunities

The strategy will not only provide an excellent opportunity to make meaningful progress in key areas of cow welfare, but also potential trading benefits. Providing evidence of continual improvement in dairy cattle welfare across the four nations of the UK may allow UK-derived dairy produce to positively differentiate itself from dairy products from other nations.

The aim is not to homogenise the dairy industry within the UK, but to ensure it continues to stand for proven and excellent welfare, can compete internationally, and to provide a solid platform on which UK supply chains can build.



## Strategy delivery plan

The five-year strategy will be executed taking the following five step approach:



\*SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound



## Implementing action

Annually, the Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy will publish individual actions – reported by the eight groups of key industry stakeholders listed in the table on the right – towards achieving the six welfare goals. In addition, they will be tasked with evidencing industry achievements and progress with data.

A process will be set up to collate data and information, so that it can be reported in the annual update.

Stakeholders will be divided into the following categories:

- Farm assurance
- Farmers
- Government
- Supply chains – processing, including markets and hauliers
- Supply chains – retail
- Research organisations
- Veterinary surgeons
- Commercial organisations



**Please contact Ruminant Health & Welfare for more information on the UK Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy.**

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