

THE STATE OF DAIRY IN THE UK



"As far as the welfare issue is concerned, the problems with beef cattle are nothing compared to the problems in the dairy industry. So anyone who avoids beef and elects to eat cheese due to welfare concerns is missing the point." (Prof J. Webster)

In the UK there are a massive two million dairy cows on 21,000 farms. Each of these dairy cows must give birth to a calf in order to produce milk. Such strain and pressure is placed on these cows that due to the highly unnatural demands, 1/4 of each herd will be killed off every year either due to lameness, mastitis or infertility. These cows do not come close to reaching their life expectancy of 20+ years and on high production farms most dairy cows are completely worn out at just three-five years old.

BOOMING BUSINESS

Modern dairy farms have the sole purpose of maximising profits, and minimising costs; the dairy industry has an annual turnover of £6 billion which accounts for 10% of all UK food and beverage sales. According to Stuart Bacon who is 'Dairy Farmer of the Future 2005', the way to reach such profits is achieved by 'culling out some of the poorer performers.'

The largest dairy processors in the UK are Dairy Crest, Arla Wisemans, and Milk Link; they spend a whopping £46 million a year on advertisement; the majority of which is aimed at children, teenagers and new mothers.

There are also Dairy Councils who's job it is to promote the industry. They aim to promote a positive image of milk and increase the consumption of dairy products irrespective of the effect it will have on your health. The EU also actively supports this industry and operates its own milk subsidy that aims to "expand the market for milk and milk products by encouraging children to consume milk and milk products, and develop a lasting habit of doing so."

The EU also operates a 'butter for manufacture' scheme in order to use up all the surplus butter fat by paying companies a subsidy to use butter in their products instead of cheaper vegetable oils.

MODERN DAIRY FARMING

"The dairy cow is exposed to more abnormal physiological demands than any other class of farm animal making her a supreme example of an overworked mother" (John Webster, Emeritus Professor of Animal Husbandry at Bristol University's clinical Veterinary Science Department).

Cows, like other mammals only produce milk to feed their young which means that they have to give birth to a calf in order to produce milk. It also means that the dairy cow must be impregnated year after year to keep the milk supply going as they do not produce endless supplies. Most dairy herds are artificially inseminated because it is cheaper than looking after a bull, but this process is very distressing to the cow.

If cows were able to follow their natural process, a female calf would suckle her mother until she was about nine months old, and remain with her mother her whole life; a male calf would stay with his mother until he was weaned at around 12 months old when he would leave to find his own bachelor herd.

In reality, the calf is taken away from the mother within a few days of birth, just so humans can drink the milk destined to feed and nourish her calf.

Taking a calf away from its mother is traumatic for both mother and baby, as strong bonds form between the two within the first few hours of birth. The calf is able to learn its mothers' calls within just 24 hours of birth. and mother and calf bellow for each other showing signs of distress for days after they are separated. Professor Webster says that this is the '*most potentially distressing incident in the life of the dairy cow.*'

The mother will then be re-impregnated two - three months later and she will begin the cycle again. She is still lactating and producing milk when she becomes

pregnant and she will have to endure seven months a year in which she is both pregnant and producing large quantities of milk.

Along with the mental anguish of being separated from her calf, the dairy cow has a long and tough physical battle ahead of her. A calf would normally feed from its mother five - six times a day so that they maximum amount of milk in her udders would be just around two litres. On modern dairy farms cows are milked just twice a day allowing masses of milk to accumulate, forcing the cow to carry 20 litres of milk. This is why many dairy cows are seen with such huge udders, and is the main reason the cows suffer lameness in their back legs and mastitis, (an udder infection).



ENLARGED AND INFECTED UDDER

To keep her strength up whilst pregnant and lactating, the dairy cow will need to eat four times the amount of food a beef cow would eat. The main problem here is that the cows cannot consume enough food to sustain their enormous output meaning they are in a state of what is known as 'metabolic hunger'. Their food intake is limited by the rate that they can eat and digest grass, also standing and eating all day in their condition is very tiring because cows would naturally spend 12-14 hours a day lying down. So there is great conflict of motivation as the cows spends most of their time tired and hungry. Professor Webster likened a dairy cows workload 'to that of a jogger who runs for six-eight hours a day'. Imagine having to do that everyday.

CAIF CRUELTY

The way in which dairy cows are bred means that half of all female calves born will be a pure dairy breed. These calves are allowed to suckle from their mother for the first day of their life so that they can receive the antibody rich milk known as colostrum which is produced immediately after the calf is born, this special milk is essential for the cow to build up its defences. After this day the calf is taken away from its mother and fed on a commercial

milk replacer, this is because the farmers want to sell as much of the mothers milk as possible.

The milk replacer is far from desirable for the calves. The first few weeks of life are when the calves are most likely to catch a fatal disease. Up-to six percent of calves die within one month,⁴ the main factor leading to these deaths is diarrhoea, caused by either low quality or incorrectly prepared milk replacers. Knowing this fact, calves are normally weaned on to solid food by four weeks of age, even though naturally they would suckle for up to 12 months.

The calves then go through a process of being kept in individual stalls for eight weeks, and then group housing until they are 15-18 months old when they will be impregnated and put outside to begin the cycle their mothers endured.

The rest of the female calves born will be dairy-beef crosses and they will be sold at market for beef, destined to be reared in semi-intensive conditions.

The male calves that are born do not have much to look forward to either. 25% of males born are shot dead after birth, a mere by-product of a cruel trade. Half of the males will be born as pure dairy cows which is of little use to a farmer as they are unable to produce milk, and the other half are born as dairy-beef crosses and will be sold at market and then raised as 'low quality' beef. Some of the male calves will be sent to veal farms. Check out our veal fact sheet for more information on this cruel trade.

So, give up the cruelty and cut out the dairy! It's really easy and far better for your health. Contact SARC for more info.

**SNATCHED AT BIRTH
AND DESTINED TO A LIFE OF HELL**

