

An update for CIWF-RSPCA on the impact of the increase in the proportion of dairy cows bred to dairy bulls after April 2007.

Mark's report raises new points while underlining old ones.

My observations are as follows:

1) The number of male dairy calves (Holsteins) either killed on farm, or not registered, continues to be disappointing and will always be higher than the Forum would like until more of these calves are reared.

The Forum also aims to reduce the number of calves exported and Mark anticipates that calf exports will not re-open over 2009.

This is yet another reason to reduce the number of newly borns killed on farm, and therefore denied access to UK beef and veal farms, by encouraging more retailers to organise integrated Holstein male calf beef supplies and persuade more rearers and finishers outside these networks to use Holsteins too.

2) Mark's Appendix 2 (the coloured block graph) shows quite clearly that the fall in dairy beef cross calf births, and the corresponding rise in the number of Holstein bull calf births, began in April 2008. This is two months earlier than was previously thought but is still in line with the Forum's now established assertion that more dairy semen was used within the dairy herd from August - September 2007.

I have calculated that from April- November 2008 somewhere round 110,000 less beef cross calves (both male and female) were born. This is an important figure for the Forum because it shows that retailers will have to quickly encourage the rearing, and finishing, of more Holstein male calves if beef production levels in the UK are not to be further reduced from summer 2010.

Examination of this graph, and other figures Mark has presented, suggest that around 28,000 additional dairy females were born between April-November 2008, a further 9,000 (approx) Holstein bull calves were registered (presumably for rearing and finishing) and a further 15,000 head were killed on farm.

The 110,000 head fall in the number of beef crosses registered is not compensated by the 9,000 head increase in Holstein male calf registrations.

But the loss to the UK beef sector is greater than this because:

The actual annual impact in the UK of the swing to dairy semen cannot be confirmed until differences for December 2008 (compared with 2007) and January-March 2009 (compared with 2008) are included.

Initial indications are that at least an additional 25,000 beef cross calves will have been lost and not replaced over this period.

It cannot be assumed that all of the 377,000 male dairy calves registered between January-November 2008 will be reared and finished for beef.

Some will have been killed as bobby calves and post-registration mortality figures have to be taken into account too. Losses will cover many thousands of calves.

In 2008 around 67,000 registered calves (of which about 90 per cent Holstein) were exported.

3) After examination of BCMS figures comparing June-October 2008 with June-October 2007 (It should have been April-October) a 10.4 per cent reduction in Belgian Blue cross births and a 9.5 per cent reduction in Limousin cross calf births were confirmed.

There was also a 9.5 per cent increase in purebred dairy calf births - both male and female.

4) It is now beyond challenge that there will be a significant, and progressive reduction in domestic beef production from August this year. Supply improvements cannot begin until summer 2010 at the earliest.

The fall will be as a result of:

Losing around 135,000 beef cross calves a year on a cross-UK basis. (110,000 April- November 2008 plus another 25,000 November-March 2008-2009.)

Not rearing a large proportion of the 67,000 calves (around 90 per cent of these were Holstein) exported from the UK between January and autumn last year.

Not replacing some of the lost calves with some of the 105,000 calves a year that are either killed on farm or not registered.

My own estimate is that overall prime beef output will decline by at least ten per cent (195,000 head) a year on a temporary basis from August-September this year – and a much higher percentage, possibly approaching 20 per cent, could be lost permanently from 2011 onwards unless many more new Holstein bull calf rearing/finishing systems are established.

It must be remembered that:

The registration of a Holstein bull calf does not mean it will automatically emerge as a finished animal 12-14 months later.

Mortality rates among Holstein bull calves are much greater than among beef cross calves because not enough of them are fed adequate levels of colostrum.

Thousands of registered Holstein bull calves are slaughtered as bobby calves for their hides and baby food products at 3-4 weeks.

The average Holstein bull carcass weighs 260-280 kilos compared with about 330-340 kilos for a beef cross. This means around at least 20 per cent more Holstein bulls must be reared to slaughter weight than the previous number of beef crosses if overall beef output is to be maintained in carcass kilo, and not headage, terms.

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