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Dairy bred calf strategy – Q&A document

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.

A key area of focus that industry have been working on is developing a strategy for calves on farm which do not currently move into either the dairy or beef supply chains and finding practicable solutions to reduce the number of calves which are routinely euthanised on farm.

The industry has made huge progress in the last few years in bringing down this number, through advances in sexed semen effectiveness and increased uptake, as well as exploring and developing wider market opportunities. Nonetheless, we are committed to make further progress in this area and with NFU and AHDB taking the lead, industry stakeholders across the board have collaborated to produce the GB Calf Strategy.

We have produced this Q&A document to introduce farmers and other industry stakeholders to the strategy, to support farmers in moving towards the industry commitment of eliminating the routine euthanasia, by 2021. This document aims to provide answers to FAQ's and we aim to update this document, as the strategy develops, or further questions are raised.

What is the GB Dairy Calf Strategy?

The GB Dairy calf strategy brings together a range of industry stakeholders, government and academia who have committed to supporting the success of the strategy in achieving the commitment of rearing all calves with care and eliminating the practice of euthanasia of calves by 2023. The strategy involves a number of priority workstreams which are being coordinated by these different organisations and these include; rearing all calves with care, encouraging responsible breeding strategies, better communication of market requirements, supporting Britain's beef sector, opening new supply chains, supporting R&D and increasing bio secure routes for TB infected herds.

[Find out more on the strategy here.](#)

Through these various workstreams and sub-groups, the strategy will continue to identify the range of challenges that face us in achieving these goals, including where there may be insufficient infrastructure on farm and in the supply chain and look to tackle these challenges through collaboration and finding opportunities to ensure the overall success of the strategy. By supporting this strategy and the producers in it we are making sure that we are upholding our high standards throughout industry.

Calf health

Why might I have to change my current breeding program?

The key to producing a calf fit for the beef industry will be using appropriate genetics that focus on daily live weight gain and carcass weights. To achieve the aims of the dairy calf strategy and produce marketable calves, some breeding programmes may need to evolve, to select appropriate genetics to produce viable calves for the dairy and the beef supply chains.

What can I do to give my calves the best start and have them ready for the beef sector?

Calf health must be taken very seriously to help give them the best start to life. The principle of rearing calves with the upmost care includes giving them access to good quality colostrum at birth and using vaccinations as a precaution to protect them against respiratory diseases and other issues. For more information use the AHDB's [Calf Management Guide](#) which is relevant for all calves, dairy or beef.

AHDB's [#ColostrumIsGold campaign](#) is also a useful resource to learn more about giving your calves the best start in life and it's also important to consider wider calf health issues to mitigate against, including pneumonia and BVD. Learn more about [BVDFree England here](#) and the [efforts in Wales](#) to combat BVD. Maintaining a close dialogue with your vet to support in calf health and management will be a positive step in ensuring as far as possible that the calves you produce and rear on farm, are healthy and viable and profitable for other elements of the supply chain.

TB

What are the barriers to having more Tb secure routes for calves?

The barriers to having more Tb secure routes for calves are being considered through the workstream in the strategy and updates will be provided as our TB policy work continues.

- **Some key focus areas include:**
- Farmer awareness / industry communication
- Farmer confidence that regulations aren't going to change
- Financial barriers, due to the cost of setting up these units/complying with the regulation.

Welsh Government have produced some guidance to support farmers in answering key questions relating to TB and calves, including "**What do I do with my calves if I am down with TB?**" – [find it here](#).

The [TBHub](#) provides support and guidance around TB, find more information here on AFU's and Isolation Units and assists farmers in overcoming the potential challenges and barriers in setting up an AFU.

What options and outlets do I have when trying to rear calves through a TB breakdown?

Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) provide a route for rearing, fattening or finishing cattle from TB-restricted and unrestricted farms. They must be approved and licensed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and can only be approved in the High Risk Area (HRA) and Edge Area of England, and the High TB Areas of Wales. AFUs can't be approved in Scotland, the Low Risk Area (LRA) of England or the Low and Intermediate TB Areas of Wales. However, TB-restricted cattle from premises in these areas can be moved onto AFUs elsewhere in England and in Wales. Find out more through the links below:

- [AFU \(in England\) Information sheet and case study](#)
- [Further information on AFU's in England & Wales](#)

TB Isolation Units (IUs) provide an outlet for calves or store cattle from TB-restricted holdings lacking the facilities for rearing. TB IUs can only source cattle from a single TB-restricted holding over a limited period of time for filling and there are certain conditions around where applications for these units can be approved. Find out more here - [TB IU's \(in England\) Information sheet](#) and here - [Further information on IU's in E&W](#).

Defra introduced a new type of approved TB unit in the High Risk Area (HRA) of England in autumn 2019, called an Approved Finishing Unit (Enhanced) with grazing. Operators of these units can source cattle from single or multiple TB-restricted and officially TB free (OTF) herds for rearing, fattening and finishing with grazing. [Read more here](#).

What are the TB testing requirements for calves under 42 days?

In Wales and Scotland all animals in TB breakdown herds are routinely tested (including those under 42 days), whereas in England calves under 42 days in a TB breakdown herd are only tested if an epidemiological risk assessment indicates that there is a risk of infection in that age group, so not routinely.

However, calves in TB breakdown herds under 42 days old do not require pre-movement TB testing to move to an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU) in England or Wales. This also applies to orange markets in England and Wales i.e. calves under 42 days old moving to a sale for TB-restricted cattle do not require pre-movement TB testing.

For further guidance please see the TB hub . [Pre-movement TB testing in Great Britain - Bovine TB | TB Hub](#) and [Skin testing - Bovine TB | TB Hub](#)

Where can I trade calves that are clear from TB but from a TB-restricted herd?

Approved dedicated sales for TB-restricted cattle are approved and licensed by the Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA). They include orange markets and herd dispersal sales. They operate in England and in high TB areas in Wales, but currently cannot be approved in Scotland. Calf collection centres are also available in England, but not currently allowed in Wales.

Orange Markets provide farmers with a trading option for clear tested cattle from TB-restricted herds. calf collection centres operate in the same way as orange markets and provide farmers with a trading

option for these calves. Calves moving to collection centres and orange markets must not be reactors, unresolved inconclusive reactors (IRs) or direct contacts (DCs). Calves from unrestricted farms, and species of livestock other than cattle are not permitted in the sale.

Find out more about these outlets on the [TBHub through this link](#), where you can also find a list of Orange Markets, by location.

Take a look at the [ibTB map](#) to locate AFU's and breakdowns in your region.

Do calves have to be over 42 days old to go to an Orange Market?

Cattle entering these gatherings from TB restricted premises must have been TB skin tested with negative results in the previous 90 days, with the exception of calves under 42 days old. Any calf 42 days or older will require a negative TB skin test in the previous 90 days.- [Approved TB Dedicated Sale for TB Restricted Cattle: Sale of Cattel from Herds under TB Movement Restrictions to Approved Destinations \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

How can farmers move calves to AFU's or IU's when TB restrictions are in place?

TB restrictions prevent movements of cattle off a TB-restricted holding except under licence. No movements off are permitted (except directly to slaughter):

- when there are reactors on farm
- prior to completion of the first SIT
- if TB testing is overdue

Movements of cattle directly to slaughter are permitted under a general or specific licence. Farmers can apply to APHA for a licence to move cattle off a TB-restricted holding, however they can only move to certain destinations e.g. TB dedicated sale (orange market), AFU, TB Isolation unit or another TB-restricted holding. All licence applications are assessed and a VRA is carried out. If the movement is deemed high risk then a licence will be refused.

Movements of cattle from a TB-restricted holding onto another TB-restricted holding will generally only be considered where the destination herd is due to have at least two SITs at severe interpretation. Cattle moving off a TB-restricted holding must have passed a TB test within a certain time frame depending on the type of destination.

The below table, from [TB Hub](#) details options for moving cattle off a TB-restricted holding under license.

Options for movement of cattle off a TB-restricted holding under licence:

| Destination | TB testing requirement* | Types of cattle |
|---|---|---|
| AFU (non-grazing vs. grazing) | Clear test within 90 days of movement | Calves (rearing AFUs). Stores and culls (finishing AFUs) |
| TB isolation unit (can only take cattle from a single source over a limited period of time) | Clear test within 30 days of movement | All types; particularly useful for groups of dairy calves |
| TB dedicated sale (orange market) | Clear test within 90 days of movement | All types |
| TB approved slaughter gatherings (red markets) | Clear test within 90 days of movement | All types |
| TB restricted holding | Clear test within 30 days of movement | All types |
| Direct to slaughter | No test required. Cattle must not be reactors, inconclusive reactors or direct contacts | All types |

*Calves under 42 days old do not require TB testing

Proactivity in engaging with the APHA in the licensing process and keeping up to date and informed will assist farmers in streamlining this process. Furthermore, the calf strategy aims to improve the bTB-secure routes to market as one of the workstreams, led by NFU, so this is a priority area.

How is the strategy looking to encourage farmers to set up Isolation Units?

The strategy is considering ways via farmer engagement, through webinars as well as promoting the work and resources within the TB Hub to assist farmers in gaining a greater understanding of the setting up and running of Isolation Units. Find out more here [TB IU's \(in England\) Information sheet and here - Further information on IU's in E&W.](#)

[To make an application to become an Isolation Unit, visit the Defra pages here: Approved bovine TB isolation unit: application - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), where you will also find guidance notes on applying.

Is there a list of Isolation Units to help farmers locate a home for young calves?

Currently there is not a list of Isolation Units, as unlike AFU's or LFU's, the license for an IU is not permanent. Therefore, there is a risk of the list constantly being out of date.

Active rearing AFU's, which can take calves from multiple holdings are listed online here [Finishing units for cattle: approved premises - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), though currently, without contacting the AFU directly, there is no distinction given on rearing AFU's versus those only appropriate for finishing cattle. The Calf Strategy is considering how to support industry in encouraging conversation and developing links to make it simpler for collaboration to occur. There are already some businesses developing platforms for collaboration, which aim to link producers and those wanting to buy and rear stock, including those from TB-restricted herds.

Have considerations been given to the practicability of the elimination of calf euthanasia when there is still a lack of AFU's equipped for calf rearing and with TB still a prominent issue? Overcrowding and other disease and welfare implications could actually be a greater concern.

This is a key element of the calf strategy in its entirety, considerations have been given to all of the challenges, current and future that the industry may face in moving to meeting the commitments of the strategy. With a dedicated bTB workstream, this is extensively covered and ongoing work around capacity, policy, engagement across the supply chain and communication and conversation are all key elements. The strategy refers to useful guidance produced by AHDB and other organisations to tackle challenges around planning, management and marketing when TB is a challenge and we continue to listen to farmers and industry to gain an increasingly holistic approach to the challenges.

Given that a calf from a BTB farm makes the same money as any other animal - where does that margin go? Can this be solved by the industry?

The workstream will be considering all the current concerns around marketing calves from TB-affected herds with the support of an industry-led forum and will look for solutions to such challenges.

Red Tractor standards

Why have Red Tractor introduced calf standards?

Red Tractor Dairy scheme standards already cover the care of youngstock on the farm regardless of gender, and Red Tractor is committed to animal welfare as a key priority.

As part of the GB Dairy Calf Strategy, Red Tractor Dairy consulted in summer 2020 on proposed standards to ensure the industry deliver on this commitment to rear all calves with care and to eliminate the euthanasia of calves by 2023.

What are the calf standards being introduced in Red Tractor? Does it mean I will have to have eliminated the routine euthanasia of calves on my farm by November 2021?

The new standards are focused on a written breeding and management policy. The standards provide clear audit points that all members will need to demonstrate compliance with. This means, that members need to be taking steps towards eliminating routine euthanasia of calves on farm, by November 2021. It does not mean that routine euthanasia must be eliminated by November 2021, when the new set of Red Tractor standards come into play. As this will take some time to take breeding and management decisions, including potential changes to infrastructure or identification of markets, Red Tractor have shared the confirmed standards now, from Autumn 2020, to allow farmers time to adapt their businesses.

[Follow this link to find the calf standards in full.](#)

How do I show compliance with the standard?

Ensure that calculations are undertaken and reflect what occurs on site. You must be able to demonstrate, via invoices and the suchlike, that semen purchases reflect the breeding plan and that markets have been identified, to sell calves into.

Does the policy have to be a standalone document?

The policy can be held within the herd health plan but must include the required elements and reflect the current breeding and management policy of the farm.

Can a third party produce the policy for us, for example, a semen company?

Farms can draw on the services of others in the sector to help and/or deliver a policy for the farm. The key is to ensure it is specific to the management practices of your own farm and reflective of numbers of livestock and calves expected.

How long do I need to keep my calves?

The Red Tractor standard is based on a breeding policy that is implemented – within the standard there is the requirement for all calves to be treated the same regardless of breed or sex, but the standard does not dictate that calves must be retained on farm, for any specific length of time. Some milk purchasers have developed their own policies around eliminating routine euthanasia of calves on farm and farmers should look to communicate with the milk buyers to ensure compliance.

What if I am shut down with TB, do I get a derogation from this standard?

Red Tractor are currently developing a list that will assist farmers in understanding when they may receive a derogation against this standard, however a TB breakdown will not be an automatic derogation and farmers should follow advice as outlined in the TB area of this document (through the [TBHub](#), [Welsh Government FAQ's](#) etc) to ensure they are prepared for such scenarios, as part of their planning.

Breeding /Genetics

Do I need to use sexed semen and will it reduce my conception rates?

Some supply chains might suggest or request the use of sexed semen as a positive way of focusing breeding, otherwise it is a commercial choice. It can be used to increase the chances of achieving a calf of the desired sex from a particular mating to take advantage of differences in value of males and females for specific marketing purposes. When first introduced, there were some initial conception rate challenges in using sexed semen. However, as technology has improved, relative conception rates for sexed semen, compared to conventional conception rates have improved to up to around 98-100% in some cases, depending upon herd fertility and the type of system used in. This means sexed semen performance is almost exactly comparable to conventional. Sexed semen increases the likelihood of having a heifer calf to over 90%, compared to 50% in conventional mating.

What genetics should I be selecting for to produce a calf fit for the beef system?

Dairy farmers have been genetically selecting their cattle for generations to produce suitable animals for calving ease and milk yield. This keen eye for genetic selection now needs to be applied to the sire to encourage positive traits for breeding beef cattle such as daily live weight gain, days to slaughter and muscle depth. Retailers and processors will play an important role to help inform producers about what the market needs and consumers demand. In the beef industry there is not one specific breed that outperforms the other, it is about finding what is best for your production systems and end

market. Take a look at the AHDB's ["Beef production from the dairy herd"](#) document, for more information.

Will it cost me more to produce these calves?

Producers will find that using a higher genetic calibre of semen and giving calves a good start to life by providing access to colostrum and vaccinations will cost a little more. However, by taking these measures and providing data on the calves produced farmers will find there is greater potential to add value to the calf, in many cases. Monitoring and data and keeping a record of performance, (especially around health and genetics) is a crucial element of successful calf production and marketing, that must be passed along the supply chain. This includes recording and sharing bull data, including the named sire on passports. It is also crucial to have a clear understanding of your markets before selecting bulls and making breeding decisions, to ensure the genetic traits are tailored toward your market requirement. Learn more about Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) and selecting a beef sire in AHDB's ["beef production from the dairy herd"](#) document.

Protecting the reputation of the industry is vital, and euthanasia of calves on farm is not acceptable by either the industry or the consumer. Regardless of financial impact all calves will need to be reared with care by 2023.

Are there genetics available that will give me what I need for my dairy herd as well as a good beef calf?

Yes. Developments in genetics across the dairy and beef supply chains are widening the options for farmers to be able to make positive decisions towards having marketable animals that offer benefits at all stages, including that at a farm-level (such as fertility, calving ease, Feed Conversion Ratio).

We will soon update this document with case studies that will illustrate the successful use of genetics to produce calves that are fit for the dairy and beef requirements. These can offer insights into the genetic options or breeds available and how real farmers have implemented these in their businesses.

Supply chain /markets / processing

How are farmers being engaged with about the strategy and supply chain changes?

Any supply chain changes in contract should be communicated with you from your retailer or processor, most will have local groups where this information can be discussed and passed down. The NFU and other industry organisations continue to lobby and represent their farmers in improving fairness and transparency in contracts (as seen via the recent contractual relationships Defra consultation) and this work aims to improve relationships between farmers and their processor.

Industry are involved and engaged with the dairy calf strategy since early ideas emerged and we have over 80 partners signed up to the commitment. Throughout the course of 2021, we will look to host various farmer and stakeholder webinars and meetings to ensure communications and a joined-up approach, across the supply chain.

What is the benefit of using an integrated supply chain model?

Integrated supply chains are a good way of producers accessing specific genetics that have been tried and tested. The producer will likely be involved with performance recording to help improve future genetics, provided advice on nutrition and conditions required to reach certain targets and access to support to help identify and correct any issues. All of this helps both the producer and finisher raise strong and resilient animals for the food chain, with valuable data and monitoring which will increase value for all parties.

Do farmers have to be part of an integrated supply chain?

No. Choice is key in every business, to make sure the producer maintains control and ownership of what they are doing. Some contracts might stipulate participation in an integrated supply chain but this is a commercial decision by the farmer. Some Integrated supply chains offer producers access to high genetics and knowledge exchange however there will still be a market for dairy farmers to sell to those beef producers who want to procure calves from livestock markets, through dealers or direct from other farms to rear.

What are the benefits of using a Livestock Market?

Livestock markets are the largest viable marketing route for dairy bred calves with over 200 years proven experience, selling a quarter of a million calves each year across England and Wales (Livestock Auctioneers' Association). The Livestock Market provides a competitive and transparent marketplace, offering a fair price representative of current market trends, working for the producer, rather than the buyer.

Livestock Markets represent all size and scale of farm businesses, successfully marketing *all* breeds, ages, sizes and sexes of calves to a wide-ranging ring side of buyers from across the beef supply chain. The Livestock Auctioneers' Association (LAA) has instigated a new system in conjunction with Arla, to ensure producer requirements are met, instilling confidence across the supply chain.

Since the COVID 19 pandemic, markets have adapted to become more efficient and effective in their operations, enabling producers to simply drop stock at the market, leaving the Auctioneers to sort, draw and present their stock for sale, achieving optimum prices.

Livestock Markets operate the highest standards of animal welfare and bio-security measures, in accordance with Red Tractor standards, and are at the fore front of the development of livestock traceability systems and animal health status.

Speak to your local Livestock Market for further information, or find your local Livestock Market by visiting: [Auction Marts | Livestock Auctioneers' Association Limited \(laa.co.uk\)](#)

Livestock Markets continue to see a growth in calves entering the live auction ring. In 2020 alone, Livestock Markets across England and Wales saw an increase of over 10% in calves presented in Livestock Markets, with no difficulty in finding purchasers for the increased numbers of calves forward.

Should we be trying to make a larger market for veal?

The UK doesn't currently have a strong market for veal but a key priority of the strategy is to develop robust supply chains for high welfare beef and veal, so through this aim the strategy will address how to grow the UK veal market, working alongside retailers who are committed, through the strategy in promoting high welfare rose-veal/dairy bull beef, to increase customer demand.

What about calves that currently have a market at 3 or 6 months?

The strategy looks to explore all potential markets and identify available opportunities for calves, including optimising existing ones (which may include a market for 3 to 6 month old calves) through collaboration between the dairy and beef supply chains. A key priority of the strategy involves ensuring all calves are reared with care, moving into pathways and markets that offer profitability at all levels of the supply chain. Through this, the strategy will identify opportunities for different markets to be maintained, grow, or emerge, ultimately all contributing towards the industry delivering upon the commitment of eliminating the practice of euthanasia in dairy calves, by 2023.

What work is in place to ensure abattoir capacity for these extra animals?

The different elements of the GB dairy calf strategy span a variety of workstreams and different groups, organisations and stakeholders across the supply chain and through government and industry. Through these different workstreams, planning to ensure smooth transitions to new markets and overcoming challenges, such as ensuring abattoir capacity, will be considered. More detailed information will be shared over the coming months.

What are the opportunities of using dairy bred calves in the beef system?

In the UK we are only 80% self-sufficient in beef. By producing more beef from the dairy system and with the support of British retailers and food service we can use this additional production to displace imports and increase our self-sufficiency. When assessing the volumes of beef currently imported in relation to approximate volume expected from an increase in dairy beef production, the reality is that the domestic beef marketplace would be able to cope with the additional animals in the marketplace.

Are retailers supportive of using dairy beef and is there more they can do?

Some retailers are supporting the initiative by creating integrated supply chains which provide an outlet for these calves and support producers through knowledge exchange and access to specific genetics. Product innovation and research and development will also be key going forwards to find new and exciting products for consumers as well as opening new markets.

Through the strategy, we continue to work with retailers as well as identifying opportunities and new relationships with food service and procurement, with a key role of the strategy promoting dairy beef in their supply chains.

I am concerned that the strategy may limit my choice as a farmer to where I can market my calves, is this being considered?

The strategy does not seek to limit farmer choice by any means, instead developing wider market opportunities for farmers to consider. There is merit in a range of systems and supply chains in offering choice for farmers, high welfare for the livestock resulting ultimately in a quality product for the consumer.

Neither the strategy, or the Red Tractor calf standard, dictates the time required to retain calves on farm.

How will this industry change affect the beef industry, will it reduce prices?

The strategy is committed to ensuring not only high welfare, but also profitability through all elements of the supply chain. The aims of the strategy can only be achieved through industry collaboration between dairy and beef supply chains and the ongoing work of the strategy will continue to account for and mitigate against any potential challenges and risks to different industries and supply chains, including the concerns of some beef producers around their markets and prices being affected. As mentioned above, when assessing the volumes of beef currently imported in relation to approximate volume expected from an increase in dairy beef production, the reality is that the domestic beef marketplace would be able to cope with the additional animals in the marketplace.

What is the advice for farmers needing to market surplus calves?

The strategy involves several aims around communication across the supply chain, through industry and government. As the strategy moves forward, we will develop farmer communications and guidance and share information on the options, processes as well as the progress required for the strategy to ultimately achieve its goals, assisting farmers in decision-making to contribute towards this. There is ongoing work in producing a list through the strategy stakeholders which will compile a plethora of Livestock Markets, online platforms, collaborative opportunities with local beef farmers and more, to identify the range of options farmers can market calves into.

When is the best time to sell/buy calves – weaned? Store? Finished?

The best time to sell your calves will depend on the type of system you run, the markets available to you and your available facilities. Those who are block calving may want to move calves quickly as they may not have the available space but those whose calving is more spread out may want to rear the calves to an older age where there may be more markets available for them at a better price. Regardless of which route producers decide to take it is important that they are prepared to give the calf the best start to life.

Practical calf-rearing questions

What additional capacity do I need on farm?

Your milk buyer might include specific terms in your contract about the time period for which you need to keep the calves or markets they should be sold into. To adhere to Red Tractor standards, a management plan for housing must outline provision of rearing facilities to cover the number of youngstock. However, the expectation is the space can be allocated not that it is always set up i.e.,

known number of pens/hutch spaces for determined number. None is the standard that calves must be retained for a set period.

[NADIS](#) and [AHDB](#) have produced some work to assist farmers in considering changes to capacity and calf housing on farm, follow the links to find out more.

Can I make a profit from a calf rearing enterprise?

Any profit made in the beef sector is dependent on market volatility, however there are opportunities for the UK to increase its self-sufficiency in beef by displacing exports. Some rearing schemes are willing to underwrite calves avoiding large amounts of capital being tied up, which helps mitigate volatility. However, producers should be aware of the terms of the agreement.

What are the challenges of buying calves from lots of different sources?

When buying calves from multiples different sources you should consider biosecurity measures to restrict the possibility of bringing disease on farm. If you are in an area of high TB levels you may want to think about becoming an isolation unit, [more information can be found on this here](#).

What are the legal requirements for rearing calves? (stocking rates etc, feeding frequency etc)

If you are going to start rearing calves you will need to consider your available facilities, ventilation, air space and calf accommodation is key to prevent pneumonia as well as other health issues. Calves can be housed in groups or individual pens but must have enough space to groom themselves, lie down and stretch. It is important to maintain a dialogue and relationship with your vets and AHDB have produced some [housing guidance](#) for farmers.