

## **Dairy herd expansion in Ireland – outcome from meetings of industry stakeholder group.**

The industry stakeholder group, having reflected on the animal health and welfare considerations relevant to dairy herds, acknowledge and agree that:

1. The sustainable development of the dairy industry in Ireland is of critical importance.
2. Sustainability includes social, ethical, environmental and economic parameters.
3. Research has identified that the health and welfare of animals in Irish dairy herds compares very favourably with other countries around the world.
4. It is critical that with the recent expansion of the dairy industry in Ireland, this favourable position is maintained and enhanced, taking into account the overall sustainability objectives.

The group has therefore agreed to issue this communication as an agreed initial industry recommendation.

### **Developing a breeding policy for a sustainable dairy industry in Ireland**

- I. Breeding policy on each farm and across the sector is crucial from a social and ethical sustainability perspective, as this determines the value and utility of calves born in dairy herds.
- II. Each farm should develop its breeding policy which takes into account the potential future utility of each calf born on the farm – either having a value as a dairy replacement animal or an animal that, following feeding, has a value in beef/veal production.
- III. Breeding for dairy type offspring should utilise high EBI sires and be limited to the extent that dairy replacement calves are required on the farm (or where the business is the production of dairy breeding animals for sale), whilst breeding of all other animals should seek to maximise the potential beef value of all calves born.
- IV. To maximise the future beef value of ‘non-dairy replacement calves’, breeding policies should, in selecting sires, take into account the sires’ dairy beef index. The potential beef value of the calves can be maximised taking into account the individual cow/heifer conformation.
- V. To minimise the number of low value, limited potential male dairy beef calves being born, the use of sexed semen should be considered as part of future breeding programmes, taking appropriate advice to maximise its potential.
- VI. Recent research projects and industry initiatives seeking to maximise the beef potential from dairy herds are welcomed and the outcomes of these research projects should be disseminated to farmer producers as widely and as quickly as possible.
- VII. Care should be exercised to ensure that such projects and programmes are coordinated to the greatest extent possible and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort.
- VIII. The recently published Teagasc breeding guidelines are a good reference point and guideline for farmers to follow.
- IX. All industry stakeholders will use their own channels of communications with members, clients and stakeholders to disseminate and promote this message.
- X. Further communications will issue on other topics relevant to the care and marketing of calves from dairy herds.

DAFM

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