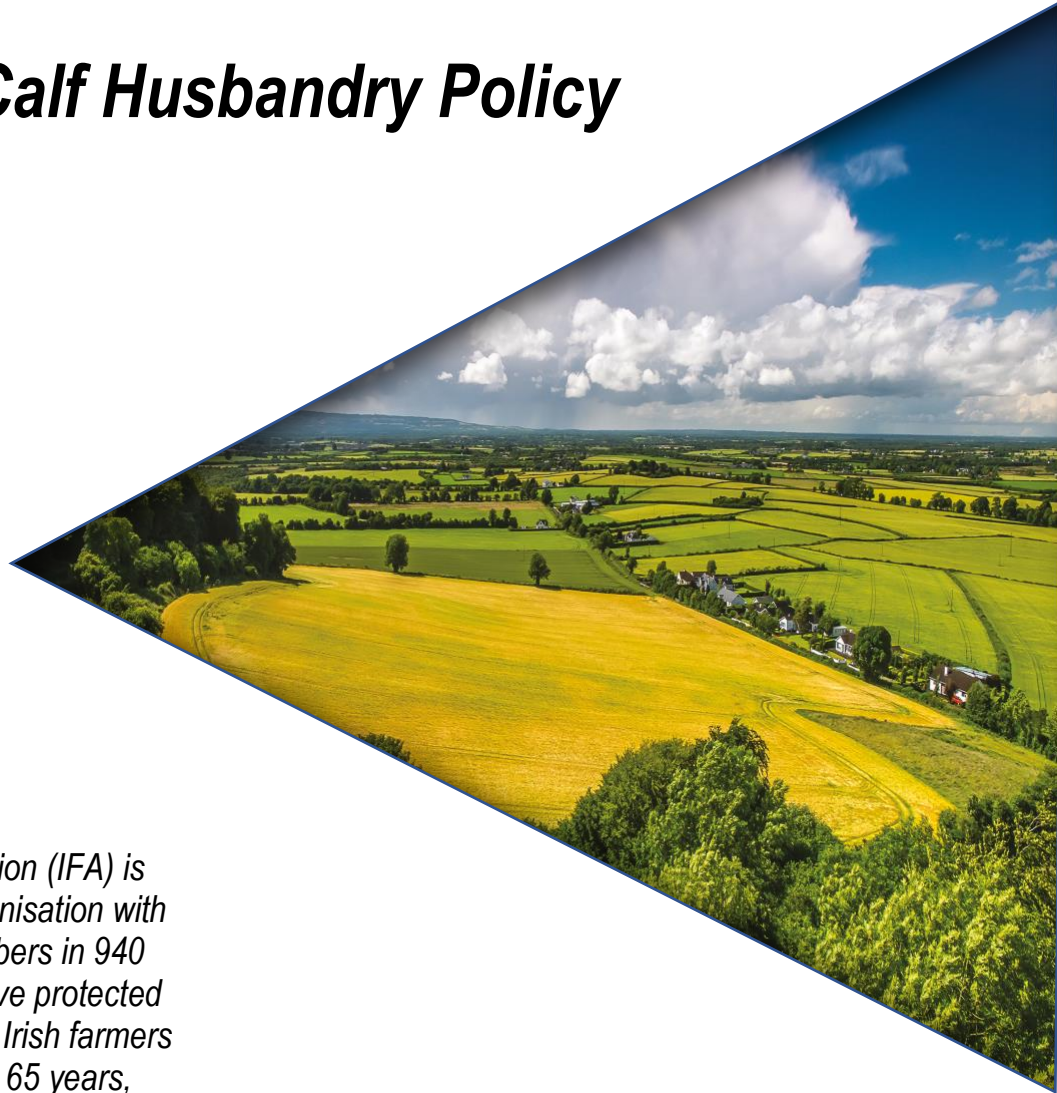




IFA Dairy Calf Husbandry Policy

December 2023

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is Ireland's largest farming organisation with approximately 77,000 members in 940 branches nationwide. We have protected and defended the interests of Irish farmers in all sectors for more than 65 years, lobbying and campaigning for improved conditions and incomes for farm families.



Introduction

The success and reputation of the Irish dairy sector is reliant upon the proper management of our dairy bred calves ensuring the highest welfare standards possible. In 2019, the IFA Dairy Committee developed a policy on dairy calf management and their welfare. Since then, the industry has further evolved with new advancements such as sexed semen and the Dairy Beef Index now available to dairy farmers to help deliver calves with better beef characteristics. We encourage dairy farmers to embrace these tools. While a lot of progress has been made by the sector to enhance calf welfare, the IFA dairy committee felt it was timely to revise its policy to address opportunities to make further gains. IFA categorically outlines that it has not and will not tolerate the mistreatment of calves on farm, at calf sales or during transport. Outlined below are detailed actions we believe each industry stakeholder should adopt to improve the welfare of our calves.

Action at Farm Level

Dairy farmers will take full responsibility for all calves born from their dairy herds for the duration of their time on the farm and will seek to optimise calf care and health and minimise mortality through the use of best calf management and rearing practices. This must mean that the any calves that leave the dairy farm have a real economic potential for the subsequent purchaser of that calf. To deliver this, the following practices are recommended:

- Continued uptake of genotyping to deliver accurate Commercial Beef Values for all calves. This will give buyers greater certainty of the genetic merit of the animals they are purchasing.
- Accelerated use of sexed semen to reduce the number of dairy bred bull calves born on farms each year.
- Encourage the use of Artificial Insemination (AI) for a longer period throughout the breeding season thus reducing the number of calves sired by stock bulls.
- Use of the Dairy Beef Index published by the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) to pick appropriate beef bulls for use on dairy cows. Bulls with a beef sub-index greater than €80 should be used on Friesian herds. Bulls with a beef sub-index of greater than €100 should be used on cross-bred herds.
- No tolerance for the use of stock bulls of low genetic merit during the breeding season. All bulls used should be genomically tested to demonstrate their ability to deliver calves that are desirable in the marketplace.
- Encourage farmers to adhere to Animal Health Ireland (AHI) guidelines on colostrum intake – “at least three litres of colostrum given within the first two hours of birth of the cows first milk” to promote immunity in calves.
- Encourage annual attendance at calf care events each year to remain up to date with latest calf welfare advice.

Action at advisory/industry stakeholder level

Industry stakeholders (Advisory, AI Companies, Milk Processors and Livestock Marts) have a role to play in improving calf welfare. This includes the following:

- Develop more industry led initiatives that foster relationships between dairy farmers with calf rearers.
- Phase out calf slaughter as per the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) charter.
- Provide competitive pricing on milk replacer, calf meal and all calf rearing equipment.
- Provide straw bedding and stock-boarded pens for calves at mart sales. Minimise overcrowding of calf pens at mart sales.
- Provide advisory programmes on the strategic use of vaccinations to minimise illness during the calving season.
- Ensure that sexed semen becomes more available, accessible and cost effective.
- The implementation of sexed semen on some farms is dependent on the use of synchronisation programmes. Such programmes are costly and complex. Assistance in their delivery and ensuring such programmes are more cost-effective is required.
- Minimise the amount of time calves spend at livestock marts during sales.

Action at Government level

The principal requirement from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is to incentivise demand for dairy bred calves through the implementation of a robust dairy-beef scheme.

- IFA has consistently lobbied for a scheme that would deliver €100 to the rearer for the first 12 months of the beef calf's life and another €100 for the rearer beyond 12 months (including dairy yearlings and suckler weanlings).
- Ensure all calf-rearing equipment is VAT refundable or alternatively implement a zero VAT rate on such investments.
- Introduce accelerated tax relief on calf housing. - Greater presence of veterinary inspectors at all calf sales.
- Secure the extension of the TB testing requirement of calves beyond 42 days.
- Maintain existing regulations that allow calves to move through marts at 14 days or older.
- Implementation and support for measures required to maintain market access across Europe.
- Continue to fund research that can support the maintenance of the live export of calves.

Action at Exporter level

Exporters play a pivotal role in our sector providing alternative marketplaces for our calves. It is vital that exporters comply the following:

- Continued compliance with Regulation 01/2005 that governs the live transport of calves.
- Zero tolerance towards the mistreatment of calves during transport.

Conclusion

The measures outlined above are practical robust actions that will deliver better outcomes for calves if implemented. We encourage all stakeholders to support us in our endeavours.

14th December 2023



IFA

IFA Dairy Calf Husbandry Policy

