

Importation of Semen
For the attention of:
Deputy Patrick Ryan
Scrutiny Panel,
Jersey Corporate Services
Scrutiny Panel.

STATES OF
JERSEY
REGISTRY
24 JUL

Ref: Importation of semen.

Dear Deputy Patrick Ryan and your Scrutiny
Panel,

I should
be grateful if you and your panel read
the newspaper cutting enclosed, so that you
may understand that lifting the ban for
the importation of semen will do nothing
to save dairy farmers from leaving the
industry, as at the end of the day it has
done nothing to help the dairy farmers
of the U.K.

Now days, your profit margin cannot be
based on the cow, but it is based per litre,
so no matter how many litres you produce
the costs will be the same.

I am seriously considering to leave the
industry in the next few months, purely
because of inflation not because my cows

2/ do not produce enough milk. It appears that the market place cannot cope with an increase in milk price, so therefore the economics for my situation do not add up.

It is a sad day for myself to have to leave the industry after 30 years, but after reading my letter I am sure you will understand.

Far too much time and money has been spent on the question of semen importation, when the Chairman of Jersey Milk and his board members should have been concentrating on a better milk price for their producers.

The States of Jersey and Jersey Milk have recently paid three Dairy farmers to leave the dairy industry, and we will be the fifth. I cannot understand the logic of getting rid of 2 million litres of milk only to import semen to get our cows to produce more. A total waste of public money.

Yours sincerely, Angela Mitchell
(Mrs. A. MITCHELL)

Soaring energy and feed prices are forcing dairy farmers to turn their animals into machines, writes Felicity Lawrence

Suddenly what we consume has become a hot political subject. According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics last week, food inflation alone is up by nearly 9%, thanks to "spiralling meat costs", "rocking" vegetable prices and steep increases in milk.

"Food security" — the jargon phrase for whether a country can feed itself — has shot up the government's agenda. And no wonder: we now produce just 58% of our own food compared with 80% just 15 years ago.

In theory, rising prices should at least help farmers who have struggled to cover the costs of production. In practice, however, the structure of today's industrialised, intensive food system is driving our farmers off the land. Subsidies have done little to save them: they are packing up even as climate change exposes how vital local production will be to our future.

A grand time to encourage UK



Most of us have little idea how our daily pinta is produced. These days, a cow's every movement is monitored by computer and when its yields start to fall, it is culled — some at

Milking the factory cow

farmers, you may think. Yet, squeezed between the vagaries of the commodity markets and the power of oligopolies, many are being forced to intensify further rather than farm more sustainably. The crisis in the dairy industry is a reflection of the wider problem

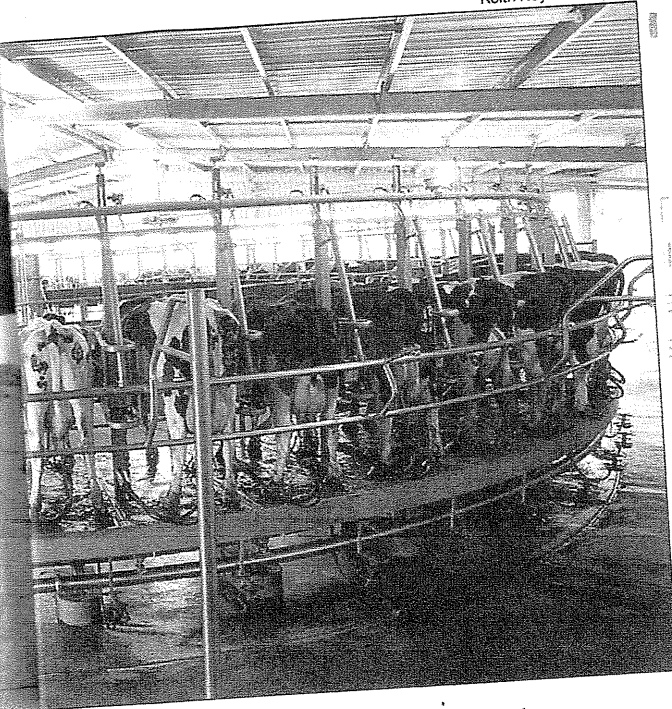
ing. David Ball, the farm manager, explained how the business worked. The farm's Holstein Friesians, bred for productivity, give so much milk that they are "emptied" three times a day. Yields are typically 9,000 litres (1,980 gallons) per cow per year

farms that have done everything to modernise and compete in a global market seem unable to make the economics work. Last year I went to Kemble Farms, in the Cotswolds, one of the most efficient milk operations in the country, to try to understand what was happen-

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— spectacular compared with just a decade ago, when the average yields were 3,500 per cow. The herd size, usually about 700 cows, puts Kemble Farms into the super-efficient league. The average number of cows on a dairy farm in the UK now is more than 100; in 1994 it was 79

Keith Reynolds/Corbis



Culled — some are killed after just two calving cycles

Cows dry

immediately post-war a dozen or so cows on a mixed farm was not unusual. In fact, Kemble is such a model of efficiency that the Chinese minister of agriculture came here to learn how this kind of modern dairy business could be imported to meet the exploding demand in his country.

A total of £2m has been invested in a shed the size of an aircraft hangar where the cows are kept indoors for nearly half of the year and fed the concentrated feed that they need to maintain such levels of production. However, the yield is still not enough for today's milk markets, said Ball, as he took me to see the farm's state-of-the-art milking parlour.

The huge shed seemed to be operated by some invisible hand. As we arrived, cow number 777 was just passing from the herd in the holding yard via an automated gate into the high-tech milking system. She filed down the approach lane to the milking machines and at the same time a signal from the transponder clipped to her foreleg was being sent to the estate's computer, which identified her and logged her in.

works on a farm that is run to the highest standards and audited by the RSPCA's Freedom Foods. At the moment, the cows here manage an average of four lactations before they have to be culled. In many intensive factory-farming systems, they manage only two or three before becoming so worn-out that they are unproductive.

"We would be driving everything — the animals, the plant — to the maximum," Ball continued. "In a factory we are used to the idea of 24/7; but with animals and land there are other considerations. We resist treating cows like machines. From the consumer point of view, dairy means cows in nice pasture — but we're being driven away from that to intensify production until we follow the poultry world."

The supermarkets' profit margin on fresh milk has increased more than fivefold in the past decade. The processors that collect, pasteurise and bottle the milk have kept about the same share of the money in the chain in that time, but the farmers' share has kept going down.

So farmers can do little except intensify. They increase the size

for human intervention.

In the pit below, three eastern European workers were moving quietly up the lines attaching teats to 36 sets of udders at a time. As the milking machine began to suck, 777's milk flowed down the pipes and through an underground meter that measured and recorded her output.

Meanwhile, information from a pedometer — also attached to her foreleg — was analysed by cutting-edge software to calculate how far she had moved inside the adjoining cowshed since her last milking.

When 777 comes into season she walks more than usual and the computer will mark her down for artificial insemination. If she has not walked as much as usual she may have an udder infection or be suffering from lameness — a condition to which cows bred for intensive dairy production are prone — and the computer will then filter her out for possible antibiotic treatment.

As I watched, 777's milk stopped pumping. Immediately detecting the interruption to the flow, the sensor in the machine forced water back up the pipes to clean both 777 and the equipment. Then the teats popped off by themselves, leaving 777 to exit through the funnel area into the shed.

"We thought that so long as we were efficient we should be able to make a profit," said Ball. The assessment was wrong, however. The problem is that even large farms such as Kemble have little influence over the price that they get for their milk. When their costs go up because of global economic forces, they cannot just pass them on.

Kemble's costs for fuel, fertiliser, water and animal feed had gone up 8% in the 12 months before my visit (and they have gone up even more now). Yet the price it was being paid for its milk by Dairy Crest, the company that processed and packed it for Sainsbury's, had fallen by 8% over the same period.

"Chilling milk is energy intensive," said Ball. "The cost of our deliveries has gone up. Feed has gone up. Fertiliser uses huge amounts of gas for its production — that's up 30% in three years. We are now selling milk below the cost of production." (After my visit the supermarkets did eventually increase what they paid the farmers, but the extra was soon swallowed up in even higher costs.)

Despite its industrial scale and being so well run, Kemble found itself looking into an economic black hole. "We either pack up or intensify further," Ball said. "We've already increased our output 15% in the past year. We're aiming for 10,000 litres per cow in the next few months."

This was going against the grain for someone like Ball, who

the dairy cow feed in the UK now depends on imported intensively produced corn and soya derivatives. Of course farmers could use clover-rich grass instead, as well as less intensively grown UK cereals and legumes. But then the milk yields would go down.

Leaving aside animal welfare, intensively produced milk appears to be nutritionally depleted

None of this is much fun for the cow. An animal producing milk to suckle its own calf makes about 10 litres a day. Intensively fed cows can be expected to produce more than 70 litres a day. In some cases they have been so overbred for high yields that their mammary glands' capacity to produce milk exceeds their ability to digest enough nutrients. New research also suggests that half of these intensively kept cows go lame in any one year, partly because they have to stand on concrete for so long and partly because their udders are too heavy for their hind legs.

Leaving aside animal welfare considerations, intensively produced milk appears to be nutritionally depleted. "You are what you eat" turns out to apply as much to cows as to humans. On the basis of official tables on the composition of food, the iron content of milk appears to have dropped by more than 60% in 60 years. Milk also appears to have lost 2% of its calcium and 21% of its magnesium. Furthermore, recent studies have found that, on average, a pint of organic milk contained 68% more omega-3 fatty acids than conventional milk.

In the past few months there has barely been enough milk — organic or otherwise — to meet demand. Meanwhile, some experts predict that if more dairy farmers continue to go to the wall, we will have to import fresh milk in five years' time. It may not be long before we are wondering how we managed to squander such a valuable heritage as our dairy farmers.

Adapted from Eat Your Heart Out: Why the Food Business Is Bad for the Planet and Your Health, by Felicity Lawrence, published by Penguin on June 26 at £8.99. Copies can be ordered for £8.54, including postage and packing, from The Sunday Times BooksFirst on 0870 165 8585