28 May 2008

Corporate Services Panel
Scrutiny Offices
States Greffe
Morier House
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Dear Scrutiny Panel

Review of the proposed importation of bovine semen

The biggest threat to the island dairy industry is by far the importation of liquid milk. This would totally devastate the island cow population, as imported milk will come into Jersey, not in the thousands of litres per annum, but in the millions of litres.

With the inefficiency of Jersey Dairy there is no way the island industry can compete on price, so it will have to rely purely on the goodwill of island consumers to maintain it's market share; something that can only be described as pure fantasy. At best the island industry will maintain about 5 million litres, then having to work extremely hard to regain another 2 to 3 million litres over a long period of time, as long as it can deliver a more competitive price and service. With 5 million litres of milk needed per annum, the island cow population would be just over 1,000 milking cows, not the present number of 3,150. The severity of this scenario fills most of the level headed milk producers with dread.

The main reasons for stopping this scenario from happening and why are listed below:

- The island cow population is globally and genetically unique and free from most of the cattle world diseases. The first straw of semen changes this uniqueness and the lack of disease resistance cannot be underestimated.

- Maintaining the unique closed island herd status gives the only defendable legal case to continuing the ban on imported liquid milk.

- Maintaining this ban not only delivers a market share capable of sustaining the island's present herd size (as long as it has an effective processing dairy) but also keeps a large part of the island's countryside with green fields and brown Jersey cows grazing them.

- The importation of semen could increase the risk of inbreeding due to the possible widespread use of a small number of top-rated sires.

- The island has a lower inbreeding co-efficient than Jersey populations in the USA and Canada. The global dominance of American genetics over all other Jersey populations is causing inbreeding to be accelerated.

- There is proof that the island cows have enough genetic variation; dismissing the need to import bovine semen due to inbreeding.
- Guernsey is in a different situation to Jersey. They imported genetics over 30 years ago, and therefore cannot defend their ban on imported milk; so they have protected their market by having a lower milk price. Until recently the Guernsey consumer has paid as little as 75p/litre and even now the price of milk is considerably lower than it is in Jersey. The Guernsey States gives the farmers 24.5p/litre in subsidies which is significantly more than the 5.5p/litre that the Jersey dairy farmers receive.

- The Guernsey breed society will call a Guernsey cow pure bred even when up to 30% of its pedigree includes Red Holstein.

- The importation of genetics cannot be limited to pure Jersey semen, and would lead to the importation of beef semen, embryos and eventually live cattle, changing Jersey's countryside forever.

The Jersey island dairy farmer should breed the cow that is best suited for the island in which she lives. This means a cow that can convert large amounts of home grown forage efficiently into milk and not chase the cow that needs vast amounts of high quality expensive imported concentrates to produce more milk. Our island cow is not the reason for the decline in the industry in the last decade, but once again she is being blamed. It is easier to blame the cow than the farmers, who need to look at themselves and question whether everything has been done to make their farms profitable.

Important areas that it is respectfully requested that the Scrutiny Panel include in their review:

1 Consultation with Professor MW Bruford (molecular ecologist interested in studying the demographic and evolutionary processes in small and fragmented populations) who was a co-author of a report issued in 2004 entitled "Population genetic structure of and inbreeding in an insular cattle breed, the Jersey, and its implications for genetic resource management". The conclusion of this report is "Overall, it appears that the current level of genetic diversity and its distribution within the island means it is unnecessary to import unrelated genetic material to the island for management purposes".

2 The introduction to P43/2008 refers to "the Island herd unsustainable as a closed herd in the context of the accepted minimum threshold of 5,000 breeding females". We believe that this statement has no scientific basis and that Durrell should be approached for permission to consult their genetics expert and senior conservation biologist Dr. Stephan Funk, for his opinion. Durrell are the world's experts in conservation and management of gene pools, and not even to ask their opinion would be a complete travesty. Durrell's telephone number is 860000 and Dr Funk is based in Jersey.

3 DEFRA should be consulted for their opinion with regard to the potential impact of genetic importation on the liquid milk ban from a EU perspective. DEFRA worked with Jersey when this was challenged previously and have more recently worked with the Isle of Man on the same issue. Anne Freeman is the person to contact at DEFRA; she is Head of Milk Trade Policy Team. We have been in contact with Anne and she has confirmed that she is more than happy to talk to the panel.

4 Although the breed society keep telling States Members that they have done all they can to further the breed, this is obviously not the case, as shown by a letter from Dr Jim Allan (Dr. Allan is a former senior lecturer in genetics at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. He holds a B.S. in agriculture from the University of Natal, an M.S. in agriculture from the University of Stellenbosch and a Ph.D. in genetics from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He currently serves as an international consultant in the field of dairy cattle breeding). to Nicholas Blampied, dated February 2007, which questions the last twenty years of island breeding and concludes "I find it difficult to understand that breeders who are **unwilling** to attempt to exploit the existing genetic variation in the Island Herd in a positive way are **willing**, on the other hand to forfeit the precious distinction of genetic individuality built up by generations of dedicated forebears, for the sake of a relatively limited improvement in milk yield and to become like all other national herds". We strongly recommend that you contact Nicholas Blampied who has Dr Jim Allan's contact details.

We believe that it is well within the Island breeders' capabilities to utilise the existing genetic variation and diversity to enhance the cow's performance and productivity to a greater extent than what has presently been achieved to date.

Furthermore it is far better to work with our Island cow as she is the individual that has to suit our Island's unique conditions.

For your information we wrote to Frank Walker before the proposition was lodged and asked to discuss our concerns with him, which we have still not been offered the opportunity to do.

Finally we would like to express our concerns about the timeframe you are working within and we would support your need for further time to ensure that your review is as comprehensive as this important issue demands.

Yours sincerely

T Barette

D Le Cornu

D Le Gresley

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DC Quénault