

STATES OF JERSEY
Corporate Services Panel
Proposed Importation of Bovine Semen

MONDAY, 16th JUNE 2008

Panel:

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman)
Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier
Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John
Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour
Professor Steven Hall (Adviser)
Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer)

Witnesses:

Mrs. C. Vint

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman):

Good morning, Mrs. Vint and welcome. It is very nice of you to spare the time to come and have a chat this morning.

Mrs. C. Vint:

Thank you.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Deputy Judy Martin, Sam Power, our officer, Constable Peter Hanning, myself, Deputy Patrick Ryan, Professor Stephen Hall, our adviser, and Connétable Graeme Butcher. We have asked you to come and see us because you uniquely have experience of running a dairy herd in Jersey and then removing the whole thing to the New Forest area and doing the same thing over there.

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Could you tell us what happened - why you did that? Other than obviously personal reasons -- we would like to establish that it was for personal reasons or for whatever other reason. Did you feel that the future was better there or ...?

Mrs. C. Vint:

There were a lot of limiting factors to where we were farming at Stonewall. We had a tenancy that was purely on an annual tenancy so there was no security of tenure ahead of us, which makes one a little bit unsettled, and that was an enormous problem ahead for us. We did not take the view that dairying in the Island was going to give the level of income that would have been needed to buy out 2 sisters on the demise of the father-in-law, so it was a very practical view. We also, at that time, had extremely grave concerns about the volume of milk that was about to be produced in the coming years and the ability of Jersey Dairy to sell it. So there were 2 very strong reasons that sort of said you had to give up. We were massively overstocked for the amount of land we had at Stonewall to carry on farming. It was a case of give up in a year or move elsewhere. We had no other choice.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Did you take local farm economic advice on that from the States of Jersey?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes, we worked -- there was an extremely good adviser, seconded from A.S. (?) from the U.K. (United Kingdom), called Janice, and we did an enormous amount of analytical work beforehand. Graham and I think and plan enormously before we do anything.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You went to the U.K.; how did you get on?

Mrs. C. Vint:

We had an extraordinary move. We literally milked at Stonewall on one afternoon and the following morning we milked the cows in Southampton. It was very wet. We had a milking parlour that did not work when we got there and the previous occupants of the farm had not left it clean. So we had a very lively time starting in and within 3 days of arriving there we also opened up to the public for visitors. We are very much a commercial working farm with 60,000 visitors a year, a seasonal enterprise on top of it as well.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

What was the interest in the Jersey Island herds? It must be a bit unique, must it not, because you were taking a Jersey Jersey herd into the U.K.?

Mrs. C. Vint:

We were kind of cartoon status in the *J.E.P.* (*Jersey Evening Post*) so we were kind of very newsworthy here and we were of interest in the media and to the visitors in the Southampton area. But I think Jersey

farmers have more interest to the heart of the local population than maybe any farmer does in the U.K. I think there is a very different approach to it there.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So the background was commercial?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Very definitely.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Let me ask you this straight question, was there any element to the commercial decision which involved you not having access to imported bull semen in the Jersey Island environment?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Not at all, at that time. It was something that we had already started researching and a number of farmers had been on trips. A group of us from the room here had been to Denmark looking at things. It was something that there was an awareness of but at that time I do not think it had got the priority maybe that it would have in my mind if I was still farming now.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Right, well let me ask you this, you moved in when?

Mrs. C. Vint:

We left the Island in 1996.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

1996. At that time how did you feel that the cows were performing, compared to the rest of the market for Jersey's milk around the world?

Mrs. C. Vint:

I could answer that in 2 ways because I can answer that with hindsight now. At the time in 1996 we thought we had fantastic cows. We had one of the top production herds in the Island; we were always number 2, number 3, in the top yields for the Island. We were producing champion producers. We thought we were kind of brilliant, in our Island terms. But when you go and see what happens elsewhere you then learn the difference between what is genetic ability and what is your management ability. The biggest lesson that came out of moving to Southampton was that in the farm at Stonewall we were able to optimise our management skills absolutely and we got probably every economic drop - and a few expensive drops - of milk out of our cows, which made us think our cows were brilliant. We

then learned that genetically our cows were not brilliant, it was that we were probably quite good farmers.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

What made you think that? When you went to the U.K. then what changed?

Mrs. C. Vint:

What changed was seeing the ability with how much food you can put into an animal for how much milk yield comes out. You know, you kind of put these 2 bottles of water in and what comes out in return and it was just massively different. We were very fortunate to be able to buy part of a herd in Essex and they were colloquially known as the “Essex girls” in the herd and they had been very well bred and using a lot of genetics throughout the world. There was New Zealand, Australian and American genetics in that herd as well as some of the older English bull families. We were just putting food into our “Island girls” and food into the “Essex girls” and the yield differences were just astronomically different.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

The Essex were better?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Far superior, sadly. It was quite a shock to us to realise what a difference there was.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Did you sort of feel that you had been isolated from the realities of the world?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Well, when you are in the Island you are kind of assessing yourself on your peers and you are not looking in a bigger area. So you are assessing yourself in yield; you are looking at your neighbouring farmers and then you are looking at your bank balance and how efficiently you are getting the milk out and converting it into money, really.

Professor S. Hall:

That is a very interesting story, in a way it has got parallels with things like the move of Ayrshire cows from Scotland down into East Anglia, you know, a similar movement of a farm and all that goes with it. But with your very interesting comparison between the 2 groups of animals on the new farm, did you notice any difference in functional traits between yours and the Essex ones?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes. Just in our particular herd and quite narrow down to our herd in trait terms, we definitely had an issue with foot angle. A couple of bulls that we had used had not done us justice in that area and we were made very aware of difference in the foot/h hoof performance of the “girls”, it was quite marked, I mean, in a straight trait.

Professor S. Hall:

What about other traits like longevity?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Virtually no difference that we could see and the “Essex girls” - we had several of them at the 9, 10, 11-years time by the time we sold up. We had that same sort of level from our “girls” from the Island as well. Longevity really was not an issue at all. The other trait, I suppose, that I really should bring up because it is the kind -- it is a difficult one to explain, really. One of the real pleasures, particularly from the North American genetics, was the quality of the udder tissue. We used to have an enormous number of students coming in that we were training who were coming in to do work placement, and cattle from North American genetics have this wonderful ability to milk out completely. You have this wonderful soft udder texture and that was the other thing that was just fantastic to have. Our cows did not have that trait. They were very -- it was much more difficult to know if they would milk right out.

Professor S. Hall:

Would it be something to do with your cows; have they been suckling calves as well?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Not particularly, I think not; I think it was a genetic thing and certainly we had the first couple of generations where we put North American genetics on to Island cows and we were -- one of the lovely things was that this change in udder texture was fantastic.

Professor S. Hall:

Thank you.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I mean obviously, we are here more to listen to you explaining your experiences and there may be things that we are not asking you and that we want you to just tell us; things that you might want to tell us that we are not asking the right questions about.

Mrs. C. Vint:

I have just prepared a very small little pack of information for you which just includes a little about -- they are mostly details taken from our sale catalogue. If I can just draw your attention to a

couple of pages of lots from the catalogue; because we had started using different genetics, we identified our cows as to whether they were Island genetics, Canadian genetics or North American in the sale catalogue and on the 2 main pages it is very easy to see the difference in yield. With lot 115, at the top of the left-hand corner, going down; they are all Island genetics on that page other than lot 119 and the difference in the first lactation in 305 days between any of the Island genetics was just huge. That is just the classic example of the difference of the yield that you get in exactly the same management situation. Over 5,000 - I think it is 5,300 litres from a heifer lactation - is very, very useful and the Island girls are doing 3,500 litres under the same management. For the cost of a different straw, it is very, very rewarding.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So, as someone with experience of the local scene and someone uniquely with experience of the U.K. scene, would you say categorically that given the same management, same control, same food input, same environmental conditions; that you would be able to say pretty categorically that in your opinion the Jersey girls were not, in various different ways, as good as the Essex girls; I think, in very simple language?

Mrs. C. Vint:

They were not as able to milk as freely. They were superb in that way. The other thing that also came into a slight effect in some of these was the element of hybrid vigour. Hybrid vigour is basically the effect of when you cross 2 populations; so in the first cross you get a bigger response. It is kind of like, I suppose, a Jersey girl marrying an Englishman and you are going to potentially get a slightly livelier personality possibly coming through. **[Laughter]** It is the same thing. There is a yield effect, which, when you go to the next generation afterwards, you do not have. Hybrid vigour is something that comes when you just cross the first 2 populations. So our figures, I would suggest, if we were still farming now and that we had some progeny of Yarrow, that maybe we would not have got the same incredible increase in yield that we have there. On the other page, which starts with lot 87, one of the things that is quite interesting on that page from the catalogue is that a lot of the bulls on there are bulls that we happened to use -- I think you will be very aware of the young bull proving scheme that has been run through the Islands for a number of years and that happens to be a page showing Snows Royal Nobility, Home Farm Stewart Genant(?), La Caroline Kestrel, as well as a couple of Stonewall-bred bulls versus an American bull and the difference is absolutely massive. We were using these animals right across the board, as very active supporters of the young bull proving scheme and the statistics on there are just hugely different.

Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour

Going back to when we met you and you very kindly helped us when we went around your farm; one of the items we discussed -- you have gone through here the benefits of the cross and the extra production

you would get with the new semen. You did mention that you had some problems when you took your herd over to England, in that they picked up all sorts of bugs and things that they were not resistant to in Jersey. In your experience, do you believe that the Island herd could be protected against, or would you think this would be something they would have to live through?

Mrs. C. Vint:

I think from our point of view, we took our -- you know, the Island has been, sort of, a tight, closed breeding population for so long and we had an extremely healthy herd and we took them to a farm that was physically dirty and they had had a lot of cows brought into it as well as the public and a large range of other animals there so our girls had a massive challenge there and it certainly affected their milk yield. They had a health challenge there. But if we are bringing semen in, in semen terms most of the problems our girls were counteracting were environmental challenges that, if you are bringing semen in, are not going to be a challenge at all.

Professor S. Hall:

In a way connected with that is, when you had the herd on the Island, did you use natural service or was it ...

Mrs. C. Vint:

We used natural services and A.I. (Artificial Insemination), whatever made sense for us.

Professor S. Hall:

Would it be true to say that natural service is more heavily used on the Island than on the mainland?

Mrs. C. Vint:

It depended what you wanted.

Professor S. Hall:

No, because, I mean, generally, in statistical terms, it tends to be natural service.

Mrs. C. Vint:

Oh, yes.

Professor S. Hall:

Is there a problem with heat detection? Would there be a problem with heat detection then if you suddenly go on to an A.I. system?

Mrs. C. Vint:

I think there are potentials for that but certainly about 15 - the guys in the room will probably tell me -- Bridget Drew did an enormous amount of work and it really was down to the level of your herdsman and the management as to whether you got your heat detection right over here. I know certainly, our herd, we were pretty on the ball on that. We were good stockmen.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Guernsey had an interesting one - I do not know what your comment is on that one. We went to Guernsey they had young bulls around - teasers. Is that the same in Jersey? What happens here?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Quite often we have a bull somewhere nearby where the girls will walk past where they are going and that will help them express the behaviour.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

A sort of magnetic effect? The girls that are on the move to the --

Mrs. C. Vint:

It is kind of a pheromone effect. It just helps and encourage them express behaviour.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Is there anything --

Mrs. C. Vint:

There are still a couple more points I would just like to bring. I think one of the things I was most concerned about in some of the -- in fact that is what made me so irate, in actual fact, was that the comment in some of the media that the animals would look physically different and that they would be giants and I have a wonderful thing here which I am very proud of and this is a photographic record of the whole of our herd in the last month or so before they were sold. I just picked out the first double page that I could and it is all by line number and 2 of these are American genetics and 2 of these are Island genetics and they are - I mean, one is a bit prettier than the other, maybe - all sound animals. There is no particular difference in stature. They have got all the good traits you want in a mature milking cow and I think it is quite important to take that on board; that they do not turn out to be giants or anything else. They are just kind of normal cows when you have used them.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I think you are making the point that there is a certain amount of hysteria in this area that is not helpful?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes. You could look through here - there are 160-odd photos in there - and you would pick out good cows and you would pick out bad cows but you would not know which was which at all.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I have got to take you up on that slightly because when we went to Guernsey they did have, I believe right at the beginning, a problem in that the first lot of imported semen they used produced cows that were appreciably taller and that has been an ongoing fact. But that, you think, is purely down to the choosing of the wrong semen as opposed to ...

Mrs. C. Vint:

Not necessarily the wrong semen, but you also get, again, this thing with the hybrid vigour. You get it in growth and size as well and I would put that down to the choice of bull. It could also -- that is just going -- I would put it more to ...

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I think they used some American semen and the cows they sent across there were being used for showing and some of them were bigger.

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

There was a trend towards it in the U.S. (United States).

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes? To taller animals?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

To taller animals and they chose that because they generally felt that to be the prized bulls.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

That is not something you noticed as far as you were concerned?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Not at all. I mean it just did not show up in what we were choosing there. The other thing I would just like to draw attention to, because I think it is quite graphic to me and I have to say, looking back on it 8 or 9 years later -- I have given you a copy of the first page of the *Alphabetical Bull Index* and that gives you the technical summary on what they call the "bull proofs" and there is a mixture along there and

hopefully one can use enough bulls to get a predicted transmitting ability that is statistically sound. It is just a very graphic example of the information that is available when a bull is being used on a very large population to the difference of bulls on the Island at the bottom of the page; that is predicted transmitting ability - those statistics - is just not available. There have not been enough there to make a very good statistical judgment of the bulls that you are able to use there. There is, I think it is the 5th one down, Classic Rochette Invincible(?) had been on the bull proving scheme and does have a P.T.A. (predicted transmitting ability) and one of the first figures shows that it is minus for milk and the ones above show you a considerable positive for milk. That selection trait - that information - it has this wonderful word called "reliability" and you kind of know what you are choosing and there is a reliability percentage figure in there so you know what you are going to get when you choose it. That is a level of information that is just fantastic when you are choosing what you are going to breed. You can breed on paper so much better with this information, rather than having 50 years of experience behind you, which is what so many people have to do on the Island now. The other thing that is in there is a sample of just a pedigree of one of the animals that we had bred. I do not know the records of Marigold Myra at all but it does show you statistically the level of what one was putting in there and all I can say is, you know, she was a cracking, good looking heifer that we sold at auction. But the genetic range of what you are able to put in there - the equation of what you are marrying together - is really quite exciting. Enormous potential there.

Professor S. Hall:

It is just that, if I understand this document correctly, that the name at top is the name of the animal; Marigold Myra. Her sire was Ballyscoon Baretta(?), her dame was Tee Vee Marigold for whom you have got 2 lactation records, and then going across, then Mason Boomer is their grandsire and there are his P.T.A.s and things and then below that we have got her granddame and those are the lactation figures? Twelve-thousand litres? Off a Jersey cow?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Yes. I have to say that 2 of our first animals, and we made the statement in our sale, we had 2 animals that we sold that were Island cross North American that were due to make 10,000 in that lactation. I have to say we had made it to 9,000 on the Island with one exceptional cow but we were going across the 10,000 barrier in 2000.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

If there are any other questions of Mrs. Vint? Thank you very, very much once again for --

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Sorry. It is just an aside, Catherine. You have given us an example of this catalogue; who is it produced by, for and the basic -- oh, we have got it in there, have we?

Mrs. C. Vint:

I have given a copy for Pat there to have but this is the auctioneer's catalogue that went out when we sold our herd but you can turn over other pages and pull out almost identical kinds of facts and figures from the Jersey Herd.

Deputy J. Martin:

And who verifies all that information?

Mrs. C. Vint:

Who verifies that? Well, the herd book does. So it is either by the Island Herd Book or the English Cattle Society.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Right. That has just, sort of, cleared it up. Thank you, Catherine.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I will continue as I started; thank you very, very much for giving us your time this morning. It was very interesting.