

Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

Review of the Proposed Importation of Bovine Semen

*Submission from Ms Suzanne E Le Feuvre
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Having been involved, in various ways for several decades, with the Jersey cow and those working with her both here and overseas, I would like to offer my impressions and conclusions to the Scrutiny Panel in relation to the proposition to import bull semen into the Island.

Overall, I see the present situation as significantly limited for those local dairy farmers who produce most of the Island's local milk and who supply most of the voluntary support for the administration of the local dairy industry and the maintenance of the Island Jersey breed.

They are stopped from using pure Jersey cattle genetics from overseas sources, despite those sources being traceable back to their Island origins, while at the same time being under continual pressure to produce milk in a high cost business setting. The latter has all the complexities of the modern world including high expectations from society in areas such as animal welfare and environmental sustainability, but local dairy farmers do not have the freedom to benefit from up-to-date genetic selection – up-to-date pure Jersey genetic selection.

Those who do not wish to use imported semen, even if importation of bull semen is allowed, will clearly still have the freedom to follow their own choices – no-one will have to use imported semen.

My background is one of scientific training- I have a B.Sc. honours degree in Microbiology and am a member of the Institute of Biology. My degree included in-depth courses on genetics and molecular biology – so I understand the concepts involved and I approach most aspects of life scientifically – through a process of gathering the available data, analysing it, and coming to a conclusion – after which I review such conclusions as new data becomes available.

My close connection with the Island Jersey began 30 years ago when I was farming correspondent for the *Jersey Evening Post* – I had grown up in farming circles with my father, Don Le Quesne, being Jersey Farmers' Union president for 13 years. For the same period I have been actively involved with both the RJA&HS and the World Jersey Cattle Bureau – variously as an ordinary member, on committees, involved in specific projects, and in paid positions for both organisations. I have been on WJCB tours to numerous countries – including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, USA, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden and Switzerland – as well as visiting Kenya and Jersey farmers there on several occasions. During the 1980s, my husband, Steve, and I had our own Jersey herd on the Island from which I developed a sincere appreciation for the hard work that being a dairy farmer is all about.

Over ten years ago, the mood amongst breeders in other countries would have been to avoid importing overseas Jersey genetics to the Island – there was still a sense of value to keeping the Island herd separate in this way, but even then there was no monetary value put to this 'request'. It must also be borne in mind that the subject of cattle genetics was still relatively new to most ordinary people – we all know much more nowadays. And in the last ten years, this overseas sense of keeping the Island herd closed to importation has faded – I was struck in the past two weeks in conversations with many overseas breeders visiting Jersey and France for the WJCB Conference how the mood is now 'Why is the decision so hard to make? Its clearly the way to go, import pure Jersey semen.' There was a feeling of sympathy towards local dairy farmers who wished to use imported Jersey semen but were being stopped from doing so.

During the past decade or so, I have also been an active member of the Société Jersiaise, including being a founder member of the Environment Section. I have a serious concern for the Island's natural environment. During the 1990s I organised, through the Environment Section, several meetings for all those involved with local food production, including members of the public and of the States. Local farmers play a vital role in keeping our Island the beautiful place it is, especially dairy farmers – the 'brown cows in green fields' concept. And I take seriously the risk of too many of the Island's major dairy farmers leaving the industry because of the practical limitations to its viability imposed upon them. The case of Alderney's lost farm in the 1990s is an apt illustration – bracken and gorse took over much of our sister island's limited countryside –

luckily they only needed to get one farm back on-line, Jersey would find it much harder to come back from a similar situation.

I am also becoming more involved in local history, particularly through the Société's History Section. In October 2007 I gave a talk on the history of the Jersey cow both here and overseas.

At the same time, I have been a member of Durrell Wildlife since the 1960s, and a volunteer since 1995, as well as cataloguing their library of over 10,000 items. I understand the concepts involved in the conservation of species – including the differences between population genetics as relevant to an endangered species or to a successful domesticated species such as the Island Jersey.

Other aspects of my work and study include being the States' Publications Editor during the 1980s, when I developed a closer understanding of the running of the States and our Island laws, adding to my knowledge of these areas from my time as a local journalist. I have also studied and taught psychology – which provides me with a perspective on the feelings involved in this debate surrounding the Jersey cow, such an icon for our Island and so valued in so many different ways.

I am convinced, after studying the evidence over these several decades, from all these varied perspectives that I have been lucky to experience, that the right way ahead for our Island to keep and develop our Island Jersey is to use imported Jersey semen, traceable back to its Island source. This latter point bears in mind that the herd books of the other Jersey associations which will be involved in such a process are as reliable as our own world-leading Jersey Herd Book.

And, as I said before, this gives equal freedom to all local dairy farmers to do what they see is best for the future of our Jersey cow and our local milk supply.

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