

STATES OF JERSEY

Corporate Services Sub-Panel Proposed Importation of Bovine Semen

FRIDAY, 20th JUNE 2008

Panel:

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

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

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

Witness:

Ms. V. Huelin

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

Good afternoon. Welcome Ms. Huelin. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. We do not have a specific question plan.

Ms. V. Huelin:

No. I did not send a submission in as such, just a letter of introduction.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

We have got your letter in front of us. First of all, for the record could you just say who you are for the recording, and your background and history.

Ms. V. Huelin:

Okay. My name is Vicky Huelin. I am not from a farming background but I have been involved in the dairy industry for about 20 years now. I started helping out on a farm from the age of 14, weekends and holidays, and then decided to go into it full-time on leaving school and went to agricultural college in the U.K. (United Kingdom) for 3 years. I spent about nearly 6 years relief milking in the Island, working on a number of herds, and I have also worked in the U.K. and spent 6 months milking cows in New Zealand and have travelled extensively round Canada visiting herds of Jerseys. At the end of the year I am hoping to take on the tenancy of a farm up at Rosel Manor. The reason I wanted to come in today was just to sort of give my point of view as a tenant farmer.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You say that you will be the youngest independent dairy farmer in the Island when that happens.

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes. As I say, not having parents who farm I will be going into it on my own.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You say here: "I will be investing a large amount of money in what I hope will be a good and secure future in the dairy industry." My first question to you would be to what level have you taken advice on the investments that you will be making? Have you taken accounting advice and general business advice?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes, I have. At present the farm I am working on is not a large dairy farm, not making big profits, but I am hoping that things will improve in the future. It is a very good opportunity for me now. If I do not take this opportunity now it will be very difficult in the future to get into the industry. I think that there is a good future. Providing we can follow the steps of this strategic plan, I think the future does look good.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You are talking about the road map, are you?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

We are told that part of that road map includes the importation of bovine semen. Do you disassociate yourself with that part of the road map?

Ms. V. Huelin:

No, not at all. I support the importation.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You support importation?

Ms. V. Huelin:

I do, yes. Having travelled around the world and seen the quality of the cattle outside the Island I think we really do need the benefit of these extra genetics that are not available to us at the moment.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

If there were to be a “no” vote how would it affect your decision making and your future, do you feel?

Ms. V. Huelin:

I would have to seriously consider whether to go into it or not because at the moment, as I say, it is a tenant farm. If I could get the average of the herd up by about 1,000 litres that would effectively pay the rent. As everybody knows, rents in the Island are not cheap at all.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So you would seriously reconsider your position?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Possibly, yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Okay, thank you. This may be something that is new to you but the question of what is being portrayed as an alternative ... it would be wrong for me to say that it is an alternative but it is being suggested that an alternative might be a form of what is being termed as an open nucleus breeding programme where there is a central herd where the best cows are donated from around the Island and then that particular herd there is specifically to produce young bulls. Have you had any experience of that?

Ms. V. Huelin:

No, but essentially over the last few years with the bull proving scheme that is what we have been trying to achieve. The breed improvement committee have been going round the Island selecting the best cows and breeding them to what they consider to be the best bulls available to us. So rather than taking all the animals into one herd, they have been staying in the herds that they are in, and that is effectively what we have been trying to do.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Are you saying that the geographical characteristics of Jersey are such that effectively this is such a small place that the bull proving scheme was aimed at doing just that without actually putting them into one herd?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes, I would say so.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Have you looked into the quota system as part of your business planning?

Ms. V. Huelin:

The quota system as it exists in the U.K.?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

No, here. You must have looked into all aspects of the local dairy industry before wanting to make your future in it.

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes. Being a tenanted farm you are a little bit restricted to what you can do with it. So if I could increase the yields of the cows I could potentially keep a few less because the herd at the size it is now can support one full-time worker and one part-time.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

How big is the herd now?

Ms. V. Huelin:

We milk 70 cows all year round.

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

Sorry, how many?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Seventy.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

To be absolutely clear, what I think I am getting from you is that without the extra milk yield, bearing in mind all of the costs that you have got, it would be unviable unless you can increase the milk yield.

Ms. V. Huelin:

It would potentially be unviable. I am in the position where I do not have a family to support which is possibly why I am willing to take the risk. If I did have a family I might be thinking differently. It will be me taking the risk and it will be me who suffers the consequences.

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Obviously you know about the heifers that are killed at the moment and if we import bull semen there will be a trade in the heifers. Have you looked into this as well?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Do you agree instead of killing them we could probably export?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Definitely. When I entered the industry I worked for Francis Ruez for a number of years part-time and we used to keep every single heifer calf there because he knew he could sell them but in later years that market has dropped away because people can acquire heifers with better milk yields behind them in the family from elsewhere.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Thank you.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Is there anything else you want to add to what you have already said? You do say in your final sentence that you feel entitled and qualified to have a say in the future of the Jersey industry.

Ms. V. Huelin:

Yes. I think as a young person entering the industry, there are not many of us now and --

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

It has been said that nobody wants to enter the industry.

Ms. V. Huelin:

No, and I think it is very important that we try and encourage younger people from outside the industry because there are so few farmers' children who are prepared to go into it. I think if we can set up some type of scheme with Highlands(?) again as there used to be, try and bring kids in and get them interested, but they have got to see that they can make a good future from farming. They are not going to go into it if they think they are just going to break even. They need to know that it is a viable industry.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

How long do you think it would take you if semen was introduced for you to be able to say: "Yes, I think this is viable"?

Ms. V. Huelin:

Well, from when the semen comes in really you are going to be looking at about 4 years before you see the results and then with any luck, looking at the results around the world, things should improve.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Can I thank you very, very much for coming to talk to us today. You have provided us with further evidence which corroborates other pieces of evidence and it is important that we have evidence that cross-references because that adds weight to whatever we have been hearing from other sources. So I thank you for that and thank you for taking the time to join us today.

Ms. V. Huelin:

Thank you.