

To the Editor of the Jersey Evening Post  
20<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Sir

Twenty-five years ago, Agriculture President, Sen. Dick Shenton took a proposition to the States to allow the controlled importation of Jersey cattle semen. Despite his best efforts the proposition was lost. What will be less appreciated is the financial cost of that decision, a cost being borne to this very day by the public of this Island as well as the beleaguered farming industry. Since 1983, the dairy industry has struggled to achieve anywhere near the level of profitability that would be considered a minimum in any other business. Independently verified farm costings currently supplied by the industry are recording the average industry profit margin before tax, interest, depreciation, and capital reinvestment at below 6% of turnover. Even the top dairy farmers have to run extremely fast to stand still. Had the Senator succeeded - what would the price of milk be today?

Good progress has been made in the four years since the industry devised a comprehensive 'Recovery Roadmap'. Hard and often painful decisions have been taken, however, the two biggest pieces of the recovery jigsaw remain unplaced, the importation of superior pedigree Jersey genetics and the relocation of the Dairy to a smaller, more efficient premises. Both of these are now within touching distance. The Industry strategy, has been subjected to government review (Promar Report) and The States Scrutiny process and been fully endorsed.

Next week's States proposition to stringently regulate Artificial Insemination Protocols and legalise the licensed importation of bovine semen remains vital; yes, most in the cattle fraternity would dearly love the new Law to dictate the pedigree status of the genetics that may be imported; however the Islands EU trade obligations make that impossible however I firmly believe our breed will be safely protected by the industry itself.

Consider these points;

1. The performance and efficiency of our local Jerseys compared to her international cousins has been widening for several decades. (Due to our small breeding population).
2. There are only 29 herds in the Island and we anticipate that number to fall. (In 1983 there were 176).
3. Currently farm financial performance is unsustainable.
4. Under a separate Law, live imports of bovines will remain illegal; this highly defensible law remains to protect our clean veterinary status.
5. Guernsey relaxed their semen importation Law in 1971; they permit pedigree Guernsey and other beef breeds to be used. Interestingly, top herds of their breed actually reside in Guernsey. Nobody I know has ever questioned the purity of their Island stock. Some of their poorer cattle are mated to beef bulls and the progeny are raised for the local meat market. Interestingly though, only 70 or so beef crosses were raised last year indicating the difficulties of economic beef production.
6. Economics will determine the extent of cross beef production and unless of value of land drops significantly, and feed prices plummet, the prospect of more than a few dozen beef crosses is remote. The rearing of high quality pedigree Jersey heifers will be far more lucrative.
7. Nobody should underestimate the resolve of the RJA&HS and the principles of The Jersey Herd Book (the breed register) to protect the integrity of our pedigree status. Today, we can utilise the many tools at our disposal including DNA profiling to allow the registration of only genuine stock.
8. The Jersey Dairy, who work extremely closely with the breed society have already declared their support and the intention to only market milk and products from only 100% pedigree RJA&HS accredited herds.
9. There is no obligation for any cattle breeder to use imported semen if they are happy with local bloodlines.

Claiming our stock are genetically unique, after exporting hundreds of thousands of our cattle around the world for the best part of three centuries is irrational, we should celebrate and indeed participate in her global success. The Jersey is not an endangered species, it is a popular dynamic breed of domestic dairy cow and we can all share in the pride that she is the finest product of our Island.

Until the advent of Artificial Insemination we were the leaders of the breed, hence the long, lucrative export trade but the advent of AI in the 1960s changed that. Bull progeny testing has now become highly scientific and increasingly accurate; the global semen market can ensure the best bulls are available virtually anywhere in the world.

Jersey Law must not continue to limit the aspirations of we cattle breeders who strive to better our herds and so create a 'centre of excellence' here in the birth-place of the breed, while at the same time, allowing our dairy industry to deliver better value.

Paul Houzé