

Deputy Ryan, (Scrutiny Panel, importation of semen)

Dear Deputy Ryan,

I have been a tenant dairy farmer for the last 20 years, and at Christmas am handing over my herd to my current herd manager. Consequently, while I have first hand knowledge of the industry, I have no axe to grind as regards my direct future involvement. Until very recently I was a supporter of importation of semen, but have spent much time during the last few weeks considering the position, which I now find very different to the one we had when the importation debate first started. I will try to keep this submission as short as possible, and in relatively separate sections.

- 1) When the debate first started we were assured that the only semen imported would be "pure Jersey" and that only specially selected bulls would be used. We now find that it will be possible to import semen from any breed we choose. Jersey Dairy will state that they will only accept milk from pure Jersey herds, but (under the new Jersey Dairy rules) there is nothing to stop people processing their own milk. This means that a farmer that wishes to take a very commercial line may well decide to keep "black and whites", process his own milk, and have no Jersey cows on his farm. This is absolutely not what the public of this island have in mind when they offer support for our industry. It is also not what tourists expect to find grazing in Jersey fields.
- 2) I think we must assume that semen and milk imports will arrive pretty at the same time (or certainly within a couple of years of each other). The "pro" lobby will argue that we need imported semen to help compete against imported milk. What this industry really needs at present is a new dairy (period). If we keep semen out then the case for importing milk weakens. (see 3 below)
- 3) In the past it has always been presumed in the industry (but not for public consumption) that it is unlikely that the ban on imported fresh milk would not hold up if referred to Brussels. Over the years Jersey States have worked hard to resist occasional importation threats, but have always been concerned that one day liquid fresh milk will end up coming into the island. I now think that, rather than wait for others to act, this issue should be taken to Brussels and fought hard by the Jersey authorities. In this day and age we are seeing an increasing emphasis being placed by the EU on the maintenance of "small unique situations", especially where breeds are concerned, and I think we in Jersey certainly have a case to make. We can easily argue for the continuation of our current position, the maintenance of our "pure Jersey cows", and the necessity to maintain an import of milk and semen ban to keep things as they are. A continued ban on milk imports (with EU approval) would mean that we could resist the importation of semen, and keep our current system. The uniqueness of our current situation is the only real positive thing we have going for us, and we must not forget that, or let it go.

- 4) We are currently still in the "unique situation" that I have just spoken about. This all changes the moment we import semen/milk. At that time we become exactly the same as everyone else, and that's when the real problems start because, in reality, we then find actually ourselves at a great disadvantage. This disadvantage comes in three parts. Firstly, our geographical location means that everything we have to import for our cows costs us more than our competitors. Secondly, while we have an extremely bouyant and competitive potato industry, we have to pay a great deal more for our land than our competitors in the UK (that is if we can find it). Thirdly, if milk is imported, that milk could potentially come from anywhere (not just the UK). We receive no EU subsidies, and the chances of us competing against heavily subsidised milk are just zero.

The pro-importation lobby would have us believe that bringing in semen is the only way to save the industry. I now believe that if we are going to maintain the Jersey cow in it's island home that we need to be taking exactly the opposite approach. I will not dwell on any of the aspects of the "improvement of the breed" by using imported genetics. At my farm we have cows that walk around in fields and eat grass, give above average yields and live (considerably) longer than average. Most importantly, my herd makes money, and that is on a rented farm and not one that I own. From a genetic point of view I see no compelling reason to import semen. We may have a tight genetic base, but some dairy farmers need to look "over the fence" a little more when it comes to using new bloodlines.

I am not sure if have made this argument well enough, and I have found it difficult to express on paper, but I am increasingly convinced that our current unique situation is our only means of maintaining the Jersey cow in Jersey. Rather than be terrified of somebody else going to Brussels for a ruling I think we should actively pursue this direction ourselves. If we lose then we would only be back to where we are at the moment, and we would write new laws, and allow the importation of semen. Once we have lost the only ace we have up our sleeve then we have no more cards to play.

I cannot stress enough that I now feel that the moment we let semen (and milk) in we are doomed to be lumped in with all the other producers in Europe, and we cannot begin to compete with them.

I would urge you to consider the argument that "fighting to maintain the status quo is hugely better than fighting the consequences of changing the current situation".

Please feel free to contact me should you need any further comment.

Kind regards,

Stephen Luce

