

## Dairy farming - a way of life

British dairy farmers understand the importance of good welfare, and take pride in the care of their cows.

Farming is much more than a job - it is a way of life and that is why you, the consumer, can be confident that British dairy cows are some of the healthiest, most productive and most contented in the world.



## What can you do to support British dairy farming?

1. Keep drinking British milk and eating British dairy products
2. Look for the Red Tractor on all dairy products
3. Visit a dairy farm to learn more about dairy farming
4. Ask your local supermarket how it is supporting its dairy farmer suppliers.

For more information visit [www.whyfarmingmatters.co.uk](http://www.whyfarmingmatters.co.uk) and [www.thisisdairyfarming.com](http://www.thisisdairyfarming.com)



The Red Tractor assurance scheme guarantees foods bearing the logo have met certain standards for animal health, environment and food safety. The whole food chain is inspected and when you see the Union Flag within the logo you can be sure you're buying a quality British product.

Visit [www.myredtractor.co.uk](http://www.myredtractor.co.uk) for more details about the Red Tractor Standards and the farmers behind the logo.



# British Dairy Farming & Cow Welfare





# Introduction

Dairy cow welfare is a top priority for all dairy farmers.

The ability of British dairy farmers to produce high quality, nutritious milk 365 days a year relies on three essential things:

1. Consistently healthy dairy cows that are able to get in calf
2. Well cared for cows that give birth to healthy calves
3. Skilled farm staff who ensure that the milk achieves the highest standards of quality, composition and hygiene.

To achieve this, dairy farmers must ensure that their cows' requirements are accommodated at all times. It is this diligent and consistent level of care that makes dairy farming one of the most knowledgeable and conscientious sectors in animal welfare.



## The British dairy industry

Dairy farms are situated right across Britain, but are concentrated mostly in areas where the climate allows the most favourable conditions for grassland farming - generally the west and southwest of England and west Wales.

There are many different types of dairy farming system in Britain and each one is carefully selected to suit the local conditions, the breed of cow, size of herd and milk yield. The majority of British dairy cows are extensively grazed to take advantage of the British climate which is generally warm, wet and ideally suited to growing grass. Most British herds graze during the spring and summer months and are housed for up to six months of the year, usually from late autumn through to the end of winter, when the weather is wet and cold and grass stops growing.

Some cows spend the majority of their time indoors in straw barns or open-sided sheds, generally referred to as 'year round housing.' These cows are fed a fresh-cut or conserved grass-based diet, and may have access to pasture or have dedicated areas for exercise and socialising.

Whichever type of farming system a farmer chooses, the dairy cow's welfare is of fundamental importance on all British dairy farms.



# British dairy farming

## Top 10 FACTS:

1. There are 13,401 dairy farmers in Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) milking 1.572 million dairy cows
2. British dairy farmers produce more than 11 billion litres of milk annually - that's 31 million litres a day
3. The average British dairy farm has 113 cows
4. The black and white Holstein Friesian is Britain's main breed of dairy cow
5. A typical dairy cow produces 6,945 litres of milk annually
6. Dairy farmers help to manage Britain's 500,000km of hedgerows - home to a wide variety of farmland birds and wildlife species
7. Greenhouse gas emissions from British dairy farms have reduced by 25% since 1990
8. Over 50% of the beef produced in Britain originates from the dairy herd
9. 97% of the British public consume dairy products, with 89% doing so daily
10. The average British person consumes 81.9 litres of milk and 6.2 kg of cheese annually.



## Cow welfare standards

In Britain the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock takes into account the Five Freedoms and provides essential guidance to farmers recommending and illustrating good agricultural farming practice.

The five freedoms are:

1. freedom from hunger and thirst
2. freedom from discomfort
3. freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. freedom to express normal behaviour
5. freedom from fear and distress.

All commercial dairy herds must be registered with Defra, which has its own inspectors, vets and advisory services.

Over 95% of British dairy farmers are members of Assured Dairy Farms (ADF), the Red Tractor certification scheme which sets strict, yet practical standards covering food safety, animal welfare, traceability and environmental protection. Milk produced to ADF standards is labelled with the Red Tractor logo.

Dairy farmers can also join the Freedom Food scheme, administered by the RSPCA.



# What are farmers doing to improve welfare?

1

## Herd Health Plans

All dairy farms have a bespoke Herd Health Plan that is designed to prevent health problems arising, and sets out what to do if a cow gets ill. Even the healthiest herd has occasional problems, and this plan sets out to all farm staff what to do if this happens. Dairy farms also have regular routine veterinary visits, with the vet used to help design Herd Health Plans, monitor what's happening on farm and set targets for animal health and welfare improvement.

2

## Health Records

Farmers must keep up-to-date, accurate and complete records for every animal. Records must be kept of all cow numbers and identification marks, births and deaths, animal movements on and off farm and veterinary treatments.

3

## Foot care and lameness

Cows' feet grow constantly, and if they get too long they can become sore and infected, making walking difficult. To help prevent lameness:

- cows' feet are bathed and trimmed as and when necessary
- cattle are bred for naturally stronger, healthier feet
- farmers record the way in which cattle walk, referred to as mobility scoring.

4

## Udder care

The incidence of mastitis, an udder infection in dairy cattle, has been in decline for many years, since the introduction of a scientifically-based industry-wide education and breeding programme.

To help further decrease mastitis levels:

- farmers use the Herd Health Plan which sets out measures to prevent infection and tackle the disease
- farmers are implementing an industry-wide control plan to help them recognise and act on the symptoms early.

5

## Fertility

Cows' reproductive cycles are closely monitored by farmers so that breeding can be timed correctly. Fertility can be linked to nutrition and farmers enlist the help of specialists to devise a healthy cow diet, providing all the energy, protein, vitamins and minerals required for a healthy pregnancy.



6

## Nutrition

As well as the basic diet of grass and other forages, most cows are fed special high-energy foods, called concentrates, in the milking parlour or elsewhere, with the daily ration carefully worked out according to the cow's age, milk yield, breed and stage of lactation.

7

## Housing

When housed, cows have a clean, dry comfortable bed and easy access to food and water at all times. Buildings are designed to give plenty of fresh air, without draughts, and with easy access for tractors for feeding, bedding down and cleaning.

8

## Milking

Cows are typically milked twice a day. Farmers ensure that the milking machines are checked and maintained regularly and are operated by experienced, trained and conscientious staff. This ensures that the milking process is as stress free and comfortable as possible for the dairy cow.

9

## Breeding

The breeding goals of the modern dairy cow include much more than milk production. British dairy farmers are increasingly choosing to breed for health, welfare and management traits such as longevity, resistance to disease and robustness alongside milk production.

10

## Calves

Ensuring that a dairy cow is able to become pregnant with a calf, maintaining the condition and health of the cow during her pregnancy and rearing a healthy calf are all essential to every dairy farmer. Farmers ensure that newborn calves receive milk from their mothers which is full of essential minerals and antibodies, after which they are reared in groups of other calves of the same age.

Generally, the females are reared to join the milking herd, but the males can either be reared for beef or sold for veal - either here in the UK or abroad.