



An Investigation into dairy farmers' attitudes towards management practices of bull calves in Ireland.



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Rationale

Farm to fork strategy emphasises the need to improve animal welfare.

Since the abolition of milk quotas, herds have been expanding.

Highly dependent on the export market and calf prices have dropped.

A lot of negativity from animal rights activists.

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Research objectives

To determine the level of knowledge exchange between advisors and farmers in discussion groups in terms of dealing with bull calves on farm.

To review farmers' attitudes and practices associated with bull calves.

To examine farmer and advisor perceptions on the impact of COVID-19 on bull calf management practices this spring.

To identify farmer and advisor perceptions on effective strategies to future proofing the dairy industry from a calf welfare perspective.

To compare the level of satisfaction between discussion group members and non-discussion group members with regard to management and housing practices.

Research methodology

Stage 1

Participants identified: All participants are dealing with Teagasc advisory services.

Stage 2

Two separate farmer and advisor questionnaires designed. Questionnaires piloted before final distribution.

Stage 3

Farmer questionnaires primarily conducted over the phone. Advisor questionnaires completed through email.

Key findings

75% of farmer participants claimed to have sufficient housing capacity at peak.

43% of farms affected by COVID-19.

Marts most common market destination for bull calves.

Farmers ranked exports as the most effective method to managing bull calves.

Market outlets and management practices two most popular subjects discussed in discussion groups.

Conclusions

Majority of farmers are adhering to best practice

Some farms need to review and improve existing housing facilities

Very interactive and engaging discussion between farmers and advisors in discussion groups in relation to bull calves

Future plans need to be put in place to ensure sufficient housing for keeping bull calves longer