



AN INVESTIGATION INTO PATHWAYS FOR NON-REPLACEMENT DAIRY CALVES AND ATTITUDES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN IN THE LIMERICK REGION

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1. Background / Context

- Questions about what will happen with all these calves next spring if there are no suitable buyers to rear them are being raised in the farming media (McCullough 2019)
- In 2019 189,235 dairy calves were exported representing an increase of 33% from 2018 (DAFM, 2019, DAFM 2020).
- Slaughter statistics report huge increases in the number of calves slaughtered under 6 weeks of age; In 2010 only 47 animals were recorded while that number rose to just under 28,000 for 2019 (DAFM, 2019, DAFM., 2011).
- Questions are being raised about suitable routes and outcomes for dairy calves. There have been calls for compromise in dairy breeding policies to allow for more valuable calves from the dairy herd (McCullough, 2019).

2. Objectives

Research Question

What are the current attitudes of different stakeholders in the Irish dairy industry to the challenge of surplus dairy spring calves and what factors are likely to influence their future practices?

Research Objectives

1. Identify the current traditional routes for non-replacement dairy calves.
2. Investigate strengths and weaknesses through case study analysis of calf pathways.
3. Identify key informants and stakeholders' attitudes and preferences for non-replacement dairy calves.
4. Identify future knowledge and advisory needs of the key farmer actors along the traditional and new alternative routes.

3. Methodology

Population

Focus Group: Dairy and Drystock Advisors in the Limerick Region.

Interviews- Intentionally sampled participants Four dairy farmers and two beef farmers. As well as Six key informant interviews (Industry Stakeholders; a mart manager, an agri-marketer, and a calf exporter, Extension; beef specialist, dairy-beef specialist and dairy specialist)

Research Methods

Exploratory approach; broken down into 3 stages;

1. Advisory Focus Group: Identify advisory needs and develop interview guides
2. Farmer semi-structured interviews: Examine farmer decision making
3. Stakeholder semi-structured interviews: Gain Expert insight into calf pathways and market challenges

4. Research Findings

Figure 1 outlines the main routes non-replacement calves can take and influencing stakeholders.

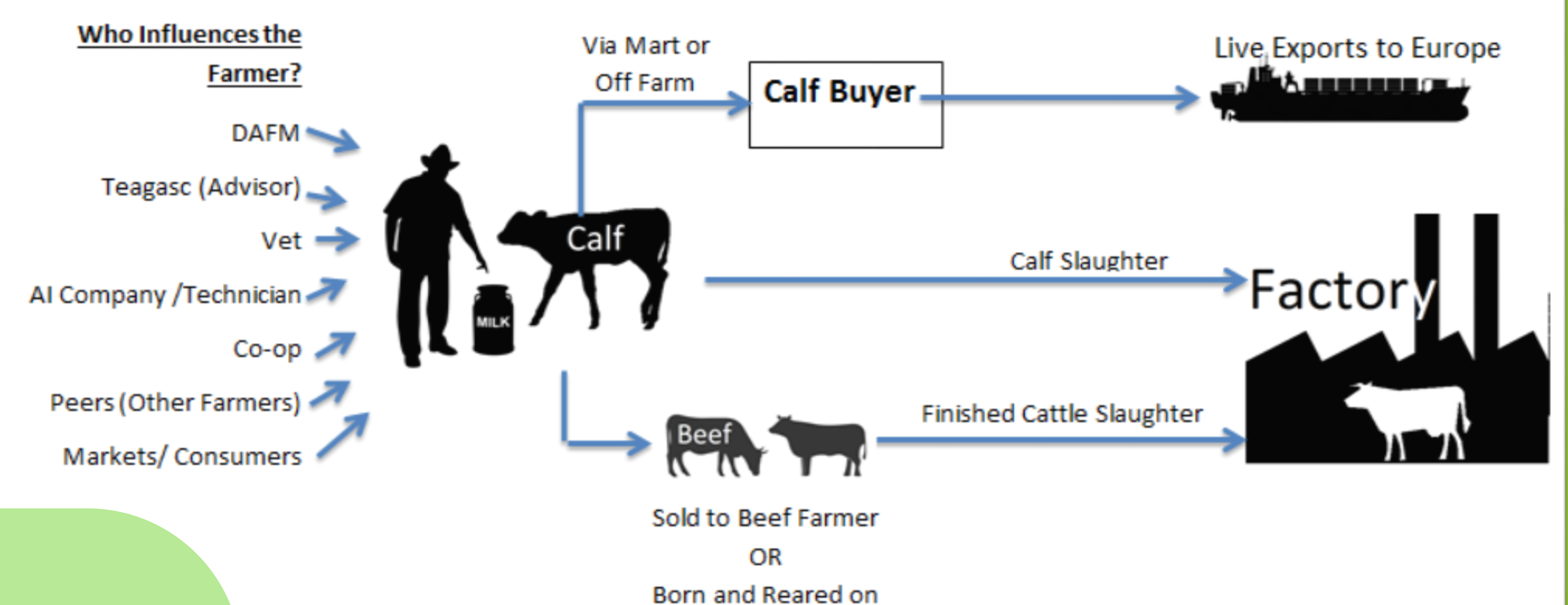
The main routes identified were:

1. Live Exports
2. Mart Sales
3. Farm Sales
4. Calf Slaughter

Farmer Decision-Making

- Farmers matched calf type to pathways.
- Welfare standards of pathways was a high priority factor.
- Other criteria included:
 - i. Ease of use
 - ii. Cost effectiveness
 - iii. System Compatibility

Pathways for non-replacement Dairy calf



Stakeholder Insights

- Concern over public perception was a common theme throughout all the interviews. Calf slaughter and poor welfare was noted as the biggest threat to Ireland's reputation.
- A suggested opportunity for marts was to facilitate the sales of calves off-farm to reduce the stress impact and support farm sales.
- Opportunities for Live exports mentioned were improving welfare standards, developing more veal markets and develop flying as a more welfare friendly mode of transport.

Role of Extension

- Education is key to supporting change.
- Promoting collaboration with training and education courses to foster the idea of unity and interdependence within the industry, instead of seeing beef and dairy as separate.
- These changes could be implemented through attitudes within the teaching of either enterprises or via discussion groups.
- When disseminating alternatives to farmers, the framing of the innovation is vital to promote uptake

Figure 1- Pathways for non-replacement dairy calves

Long term strategies, suggested by key informants to improve calf markets included:

- Improving calf quality true strategic breeding policy
- Maximizing alternatives outlets to live exports
- and developing a viable beef blueprint to improve domestic outlets

5. Conclusions

- Understanding what farmers' factor into their decisions allows for targeted education and information campaigns which have been shown to more effectively change mindsets than generalize initiatives (Lam et al., 2011, de Lauwere et al., 2012).
- All three groups had concerns regarding animal welfare, and they felt that this could either be a threat or an opportunity for the industry
- Ireland's heavy reliance on live exporting of calves leaves the market very vulnerable to anything that threatens exports. There was a widely held view of the need to increase the alternative routes for calves to reduce this reliance, to make the Irish calf market more robust.
- The development of a collective best practice could help to improve the overall standard of the industry through improvements to animal welfare standards across all sectors in the supply chain and industry, to reduce threats of exposés and strengthen Ireland's reputation to the domestic market and worldwide.
- There is no one solution to solving the issues associated with the surplus non-replacement calves in the spring, but a combination of many solutions.
- This study was limited in its scope, but the findings suggest the need for further research to include more stakeholders and further develop the understanding of calf markets.

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