

Dairy Cows Fact Sheet

In this factsheet...

1. Cruel separation
2. The fate of the calf
3. The strain of producing enormous amounts of milk
4. Frustrated Maternal Instincts
5. Induced calving
6. The docking of cows' tails
7. Dehorning of cows, disbudding of calves
8. Statistics
9. Dairy health myths
10. Dairy's impact on the environment
11. Conclusion—the ethics of the dairy industry

To keep producing milk for human consumption, a dairy cow must produce a calf each year.

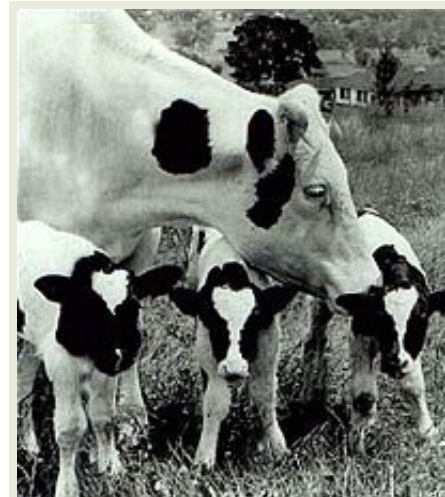
Cruel separation

Calves are taken from their mothers within 12-24 hours of birth. If nature was allowed to take its course—calves would suckle from their mother for several months, even up to a year. Mother cows, like most mammals have a strong maternal bond. One study found that this bond was formed in as little as five minutes.[1]

When calves are removed mother cows will frantically bellow for the offspring that they will never see again. Separated calves appear frightened and bewildered. Regardless of how this situation is handled this separation causes enormous stress for both the cow and calf.

New mothers are returned to the milking herd to maximise profits. The milk that nature destined for the calf is then processed for human consumption.

The fate of the calf



Calves are taken from their mothers within 12-24 hours of birth. The separation breaks a strong maternal bond, and both cows and calves suffer.

Around three quarters of a million unwanted dairy calves, not wanted for herd replacement or rearing for pink veal, are slaughtered each year as 'waste-products' of the dairy industry — usually at around the tender age of 5 - 6 days old. Dairy calves are not valued as they don't grow at the same rate as beef calves and their meat quality is considered sub-standard by the beef industry.



As soon as calves reach their fifth day of life (after separation from their mothers they are fed a milk substitute) the Australian livestock transport standards [2] allow the calves to be transported to abattoirs and saleyards. Bewildered calves are subjected to the stresses of unfamiliar sights and sounds and multiple and often rough handling as they are transported to calf scales, sale yards and slaughterhouses.

While Standards and Guidelines are written to protect the welfare of animals during transport [2], these fall far short from protecting these young vulnerable animals from suffering.

For example, the industry deems it acceptable to withhold food (milk) from five day old calves for up to 30 hours before they are slaughtered. This means that calves can be fed in the morning, then transported and kept at the abattoir overnight without any food before being killed the next day. To go without food for such an extensive period of time has an enormous negative welfare impact due to a feeling of hunger next to the already stressful event of transport. Whilst calves normally suckle about 5 times a day, the Australian Standards and Guidelines for transporting animals allow this to happen.

The life of a dairy cow

The strain of producing enormous amounts of milk

The natural lifespan of a cow is up to 20 years, yet few cows live beyond the age of seven years, and many younger animals go to slaughter.

Selective breeding, and more recently genetic manipulation, has resulted in the selection and production of cows which produce enormous amounts of milk. The modern dairy cow can produce about 35-50 litres of milk per day—about ten times more milk than her calf would need

Producing large quantities of milk puts a significant metabolic strain on the animal. The great weight of the udders often causes painful stretching or tearing of ligaments and frequently causes foot problems, such as laminitis. These foot problems can be associated with significant pain. Dairy cattle are also susceptible to infections of the teat and udder (mastitis) - this can be very painful.

The milking machine itself may render the cow more susceptible to infection. The front teats may be subjected to vacuum pulsing for up to two minutes after the quarter has been emptied and while the hind teats are still yielding. This is believed to be painful for the cow, and may also weaken tissue. The nature of the vacuum milking process is known to increase the possibility of infection.



Frustrated Maternal Instincts

A young female (heifer) has her first calf at two years of age. The calf is taken away, usually within 12-24 hours of birth, and the mother is milked to capacity. She is ready to conceive again about three weeks later, and every three weeks after that. She is put 'in calf' again at her second or third heat, and milking continues for some 10 months after she has given birth. She is rested for several weeks before the next calf arrives, then the cycle continues for as long as she can continue to produce enough milk to be a "profitable unit".

It is clear that separating a calf from its mother causes significant distress and suffering to both animals.

Induced calving

This is a 'herd management practice' used to induce the cows in the herd to calve in a short period of time—regardless of when they were mated and conceived. It requires the injection of corticosteroids by a veterinarian to prematurely trigger the birth of the calf and thereby allowing the cow to re-enter the 'milking' herd at an earlier time.

The welfare of the mother cow is often compromised (particularly if greater than 3 weeks of expected gestation) as the procedure increases the risk of mastitis, metabolic diseases, retained membranes and infection. The welfare of the prematurely born calf is also of concern as the calf may be weak, requiring special care and attention. In some cases calves should be immediately killed on farm (a few farmers wish to undertake this task, and may not be skilled). A veterinarian rarely attends the birth to monitor the health of cow and calf. A 2005 national survey showed that the routine use of induction in seasonal dairy herds is declining but no industry figures are made available to be able to determine how wide-spread the use of this concerning practice currently is.

The docking of cows' tails

In some 'dairy' regions, such as Gippsland in Victoria, the 'docking' (surgical amputation or using elastic rings) of a cow's tail is quite common—sometimes only a small part of the tail is left intact. It is done because dairy farmers don't like to be swished in the face with a dirty tail whilst in the milking shed, and a mistaken belief that dirty tails contribute to higher bacterial contamination and perhaps higher levels of mastitis. New shed designs and research have made both reasons redundant—yet the practice still continues. A 2005 national survey found that 20% of dairy farmers routinely dock cows' tails, but that the practice is declining.

Without a tail the cows are inevitably irritated by flies that they are unable to dislodge. The amputation causes immediate pain and the nerve damage to the stump may result in chronic pain. The practice is prohibited in some states, and the Model Code of Practice for cattle indicates it should only be done 'for udder health' (already discredited by research) or on a veterinarian's advice. It is likely that where a farmer does it 'routinely', that no veterinary advice is sought, nor pain relief used.

Dehorning of cows, disbudding of calves

Dairy breeds of cattle will usually grow horns and in the jostling involved during the herding process for twice a day milking, they may injure other cows. Therefore, heifer (female) calves being raised to enter the milking herd will usually undergo 'disbudding' at an early age (less than 6 months of age).

This is usually done by applying heat cauterization to the horn buds, or by using a knife or scoop tool to remove all the horn growth tissues in the horn bud. Currently this painful procedure is done without analgesia or sedation (though pain relief regimes have been developed for this procedure).

If dairy calves are not 'disbudded', older dairy cattle may be 'dehorned'—a painful and distressing procedure that also carries a higher risk of infection and even blowfly infestation in some regions. The Code of Practice recommends dehorning without analgesia should not occur in cattle over 6 months of age—but this routinely occurs (in the beef industry and to some extent in the dairy industry). Researchers have shown that dehorning adult cattle has 'severe adverse effects on welfare'. Pain relief is not routinely used because it would add to costs and time to conduct the procedure.

Statistics

As with other farm-based businesses the industry has grown dramatically over the past few decades while the number of farms reduced by nearly two third (64%) from 22,000 in 1980 to 7,511 in mid-2010; the average herd size has increased from small family farms with an average of 85 cows in 1980 to 220 in 2009/10. The national dairy herd of 1.6 million cows pumped out 9,023 million litres of milk in 2009/10. This means that every cow made 5,445 litres of milk. [3]

Dairy health myths

Dairy products are promoted to consumers as healthy and even as an essential part of our diet to maintain strong bones. But are milk, cheese and butter indeed the wonder foods that the dairy industry wants us to believe they are? A closer look at the research paints a different picture.

Many studies of bone fracture risk provide little or no evidence that milk or other dairy products benefit bone. Moreover, many recent studies have shown that osteoporotic bone fracture rates are highest in countries that consume the most dairy, calcium and animal protein. [4] Contrary to what many are led to believe, several studies show that calcium from plant foods tends to be better absorbed than from dairy. Instead of increasing dairy consumption, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends increasing physical activity, reducing intakes of animal protein, and increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables to promote healthy bones (5).

There are strong indications that consuming dairy can have some serious negative health effects. Due to its relatively high contents of saturated fat, total fat and cholesterol, dairy products contribute indirectly to obesity, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions. More directly it may contribute to the risk of ovarian and prostate cancers, autoimmune diseases, and ear infections and allergies in children. [4]

One thing is for certain, milk is not necessary for humans after weaning and the nutrients it contains

are readily available in plant foods such as beans, grains and many vegetables. [Click here for more information on dairy-free recipes and nutrition](http://whyveg.com/nutrition.php) (<http://whyveg.com/nutrition.php>) .

Dairy's impact on the environment

The production of milk has a major impact on [the environment](http://whyveg.com/save_the_planet/) (http://whyveg.com/save_the_planet/) . Cows produce a lot of Methane and Nitrous Oxide in their digestion system. These are greenhouse gasses that are about 21 and 296 times as strong as that of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) respectively. Because of these emissions the dairy industry alone contributes 3% to global greenhouse gas emissions (and that is when excluding post-farm (dairy processing) and land use emissions). [6]

Expressed in Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) quantities, the greenhouse gas emissions for every kg of milk range from 0.9-1.8 kg CO₂, varying between countries and farming systems. [6] This is equivalent to driving between 10 and 20 km in a Toyota Prius.

Cows also produce a lot of manure which pollute water and soil and can disturb the natural nutrient balance needed for normal plant growth. A single dairy cow produces about 120 pounds of wet manure per day, which is equivalent to the waste produced by 20–40 people. [7] With a dairy herd of 1.6 million cows, this means that the Australian dairy industry produces far more manure than the entire Australian human population.

Another impact of the dairy industry on the Australian environment is by its massive use of water and land area. In 2004-2005 the dairy industry was responsible for 19% of all the water used in Australian agriculture. [8] This is more than 12% of all the water used in Australia. Cows need a lot of land to graze on (if they get the opportunity) and the production of their feed also takes up a lot of land area. The production of cattle feed is a major reason for deforestation and is putting pressure on nature both in Australia and overseas.

Conclusion—the ethics of the dairy industry

As with every other animal industry, it is in the interests of the dairy industry for their customers not to know the reality of the industry. They are keenly aware that many milk drinkers—especially women—would be appalled by an industry that deliberately gets a female pregnant, allows her to give birth and greet her newborn, only then to remove her young—and in most cases send her calf to be slaughtered before they have even experienced a week of life.

References

- [1] Frances C. Flower and Daniel M. Weary, "Effects of Early Separation on the Dairy Cow and Calf: 2. Separation at 1 Day and 2 Weeks After Birth," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 70 (2001): 275-284
- [2] Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land transport of livestock, Edition One, December 2008
- [3] Dairy Australia, March 2010 dairyaustralia.com.au/Our-Dairy-Industry/Industry-Statistics.aspx
- [4] A.J. Lanou, *Should dairy be recommended as part of a healthy vegetarian diet? Counterpoint1–3*, *Am J Clin Nutr* 2009; 89(suppl): 1638S–42S
- [5] Report of a Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation. Human vitamin and mineral requirements. September 1998, Bangkok, Thailand. Available from: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/es/esn/nutrition/Vitmi/vitmi.html> (cited 24 October 2008).
- [6] A sustainable dairy sector; Global, regional and life cycle facts and figures on greenhouse-gas emissions. Delft, CE, September 2008. Commissioned by: European Dairy Association
- [7] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Notes from Underground*, Fall 2001
- [8] Australian Government – National Water Commission, water.gov.au/WaterUse/Agriculturalwateruse/index.aspx?Menu=Level1_4_4

Like

Be the first of your friends to like this.

**Animals
Australia**
the voice for animals

Animals Australia
The Voice for Animals
www.AnimalsAustralia.org

37 O'Connell St,
North Melbourne
Victoria 3051, Australia

Ph: (613) 9329 6333
Fax: (613) 9329 6441
Freecall: 1800 888 584