



Live Exports

The Fate of British Dairy Calves



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Published by Animal Aid, May 2006

ISBN: 1-905327-08-0



Suffering to Serve You Milk and Veal: Inextricably Linked

Suffering to Serve You

There are approximately two million dairy cows in the UK dairy herd. (1) Cows – like women and other mammals – do not produce milk automatically but do so only when milk is needed to feed their infants. In order to keep cows producing the maximum yield, they are impregnated and forced to give birth once a year. To ensure that there is no let-up in the production of milk, dairy cows are artificially inseminated just three months after giving birth. This means that for seven months per year, the dairy cow must tolerate the dual physiological burden of being pregnant and producing milk for a baby already taken from her. (2)

Calves born to dairy cows are taken from their mothers after just a day or two, and the milk intended for them is bottled for human consumption. Some of the female calves will enter the dairy herd and undergo the cycle of insemination, pregnancy, birth and separation – suffering the enormous physical and emotional stresses this places upon them. Male calves are fated to suffer an altogether different torment. The selective breeding of dairy cows has created an animal economically useful only in one area: milk production. As male calves cannot produce milk, and they are generally considered too scrawny for meat, they are, in financial terms, of little or no value.

Milk and Veal: Inextricably Linked

Before the Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE) crisis struck in the 1990s, approximately half a million male dairy calves each year were exported to the Continent, where they were reared in veal farms – many in systems so cruel that they are illegal in the UK. (3) (See page 2 for further details about veal crates.)

When exposed to scrutiny, the cruelty of the veal crate system struck a chord with this compassionate nation and in 1990 the British government outlawed veal crates on welfare grounds. The crates remain legal in the rest of the European Union (EU) until the end of 2006 when they will be banned outright. (4)

While Britain can be proud of leading the way on this welfare issue, banning veal crates is merely treating a symptom, while the cause – people's demand for cow's milk – remains unchanged. If consumers insist on drinking the milk of another animal, cows will suffer and many of their offspring – a waste by-product of the milk industry – will be shot at birth or shipped abroad and reared for veal.



Journey to Hell

Calves as young as four weeks old (5) may be sent overseas in journeys lasting 20 hours or more. (6) These young animals – weak and vulnerable without their mothers' milk and protection – undergo journeys which place immense mental and physical stresses upon them. A Bristol University study has found that calves fare particularly badly during transportation and in livestock markets. Dr T Knowles, who conducted the study concluded: "Evidence from the literature suggests that young calves are not well adapted to cope with transport and marketing, often suffering relatively high rates of morbidity [illness] and mortality, both during, and in the few weeks immediately following transport ... Comparatively few normal calves actually die during transport but they succumb, usually within four weeks, to secondary disease as a consequence of their inability to respond appropriately to transport." (7)

Current legislation permits calves to travel for nine hours, to have a one hour "rest" period, and then to be transported again for a further nine hours. (8) Loading the animals on and off the transporter can be a brutal and terrifying experience which causes immense distress in itself. To subject the calves to this procedure twice in one hour only adds to their trauma and makes the "rest" period far from restful.

The cited legislation, however, does not fully represent the total transportation time. If the driver is within two hours of the final destination when the maximum 19 hours is reached, he may continue, taking the journey time to 21 hours.

The sea journey is a hellish experience. Despite the buffeting waves and cramped conditions, this part of the journey is discounted when the hours are totted up. In reality, the rules allow calves to be transported for 24 hours before reaching their destination.

Incarcerated

Upon arrival, the calves will be confined to a crate for up to 20 weeks. Veal crates are some of the most barbaric contraptions used by the farming industry.

Designed to prevent almost all movement that would allow the calf to strengthen his muscles and thereby toughen his tender flesh, the crates are so narrow that calves cannot even turn around in them. After 1998, it became illegal to build or rebuild these crates (9), and yet calves in the EU remain incarcerated in units that prevent them from turning around or grooming themselves. (10) Resting and sleeping under such conditions is almost impossible.

**Journey to Hell
Incarcerated**



Enfeebled

In order to maintain the pale milkiness of their young flesh, veal calves are fed a high-fat, low-iron milk substitute. Denying them sufficient iron in their diet has two effects: the anaemic flesh remains pale and reaches a premium price, and the calf becomes weaker and shows an increased susceptibility to disease. (11) Desperate for nourishment, they lick the iron bars of their crates, or the urine that soaks into the wooden slats that they stand on, in an attempt to ingest nutrients. Only in 1998 did an EU directive force farmers to provide each calf with a minimum daily ration of fibrous material and a certain amount of iron to alleviate the worst of their malnutrition. (12) According to Professor John Webster of the Veterinary School at Bristol University, calves, sickened by this deviant diet, become predisposed to infectious enteritis and chronic indigestion. (13)

Simply to keep these pathetically weak animals alive, farmers routinely administer antibiotics to stave off diseases. (14) Residues of antibiotics have been found in calf meat, (15) the consumption of which can increase human resistance to antibiotics and allow “superbugs” to develop.

Once veal crates are finally phased out all calves will be housed in small groups inside enclosures. While this will afford them both less discomfort than they currently endure and more company, it is not a huge leap forward in terms of their welfare. Calves will still be taken from their mothers – a separation that is heartbreaking to witness – and shipped overseas. Cross-infection of scours and respiratory disease – already common in calves – is likely to increase when they are sharing the same air space and standing in one another’s faeces.

Veal calves are slaughtered before they reach six months of age. (16)

Campaigns against the Trade

As the public became aware of the horrific suffering of calves sent overseas to be incarcerated in veal crates, campaigns sprung up around the country. Wherever calves were being exported from – ports and airports – campaigners took to the streets. In 1995, the protests peaked with thousands of ‘ordinary people’ attending demonstrations around the country, particularly at the ports of Shoreham in Sussex and Brightlingsea in Essex. But it was at Coventry airport that committed animal rights campaigner, Jill Phipps, died as she tried to stop a lorry carrying calves from entering the airport. Jill ran in front of the truck expecting it to stop but the convoy kept moving and she was crushed beneath the wheels, dying instantly. (17)

In 1996, calves received a reprieve of sorts. Widespread panic over BSE led the EU to ban live exports from Britain. All of a sudden, the export market for British dairy calves was wiped out. The situation remained at a standstill for 10 years and many male calves, previously destined for Continental veal farms, were instead shot at birth or shortly afterwards. It has been reported that the suspension of live exports due to BSE cost the industry around £675 million every year. (18)



Subsidising a Rotten Industry

Farmers did not go uncompensated. The Calf Processing Aid Scheme introduced in 1996 paid farmers up to £107 for each male calf who was slaughtered within days of birth (19) and whose flesh was not to enter the human food chain.

The scheme was withdrawn in 1999 by which time the deaths of 1.7 million calves had enriched farmers by almost £150 million. (20) The question on many lips was: would any other industry which had caused such a catastrophe through mismanagement, corner-cutting and basic incompetence have been bailed out to such an extent?

With the withdrawal of the Calf Processing Aid Scheme, farmers disposed of calves through hunt kennels that fed them to the hounds, or shot and buried them on their farms. (21) The Farm Animal Welfare Council voiced concerns over unskilled workers killing calves using “inappropriate methods” (22) but the slaughter continued.

In 2003, an EU directive banned the burial of calves on farms (apart from those in designated remote areas). (23) Unwanted male calves are currently shot on site and they are either fed to hunting hounds or their carcasses are sent away for incineration or rendering. (24)

A Backward Step

Over the last ten years, the government has had ample opportunity to find alternatives to shipping calves overseas. In the Labour Party’s paper published prior to the 1997 election, it was stated that: ‘Labour would, if possible, use the law to ban the export of calves destined for the cruel veal crate... Where animals are exported live, the public must have full confidence that the strictest possible welfare rules are being applied to this trade.’ (25)

Yet over the past decade little has changed. On March 8th 2006, the EU Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) decided that the UK had done enough to stamp out BSE and that calves born in the UK no longer posed a threat to human health. It voted in favour of lifting the 10 year ban on the export of live cattle from the UK, paving the way once more for British dairy calves to be sent to Continental veal crates.

In contrast to their earlier expressions of disquiet about the trade, the Labour government celebrated the news that the export of live calves was set to resume.

Subsidising a Rotten Industry A Backward Step



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A special report by Animal Aid
Published May 2006

**Animal Aid exposes and campaigns
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