



Royal Jersey Agricultural & Horticultural Society

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

A pamphlet published in February 2008

“Why bull semen should be imported into the Island of Jersey.”

The Royal Jersey Agricultural & Horticultural Society was founded in 1833 for, amongst other things, “*the improvement of agriculture and breeding of cattle*”. The Agricultural Council of the Society, being true to its original aims, believes that **it is now vital to permit the importation of semen** to enable cattle breeders in Jersey to continue their work of improving the Jersey breed in its Island home. The key reasons why the importation of genetics in the form of bull semen is necessary are:

- **To improve the Jersey cow in the Island.**
- **To improve farm efficiency.**
- **To support the majority of dairy farmers, who want to import semen.**
- **To complete a key part of the industry recovery plan.**

This pamphlet sets out the key issues, the need for importation and addresses any arguments put forward against.

Background:

The Island used to enjoy a vibrant export trade in cattle as other countries sought to establish their own populations. Now, however, these countries have developed the breed using advanced selection procedures to identify superior animals and with their larger populations are able to make faster improvements than breeders in the Island. **Today the export trade is virtually non-existent as the breeding merit of Island cattle has been left behind by the rest of the world and is thus no longer valued by cattle breeders overseas.**

In 2002 the dairy industry initiated a re-structuring scheme, in partnership with the States of Jersey, to re-align milk supply to market demand. This involved the planned reduction in the Island herd of approximately 1,000 head of cattle. This event, which reduced the genetic pool in the Island, triggered the RJA&HS in 2003 to commission research by Dr Maurice Bichard into the sustainable development of the Island’s dairy cattle. Dr Bichard, who is a highly respected animal geneticist, concluded that “*it would be of benefit to Island farmers and their customers, if importation of Jersey breed semen were permitted*”.

Since that time continuing changes in the marketplace for milk has resulted in a further reduction in the Island herd which now stands at some 3,000 breeding cows. The Council believes this renders the **Island herd unsustainable as a closed population** in the context of the accepted minimum threshold of 5,000 breeding females to maintain such a status.

As Dr Bichard pointed out in his report that it is simply not possible for the Island herd to keep up with the improvements being made in other Jersey populations. This means that over time the Island herd will fall further behind and the challenge for the future will become **avoiding inbreeding** as the population is now kept in less than 30 herds.

Why the need to import semen?

There are many interlinking reasons why semen needs to be imported but the most important ones are:

1. **To improve the Jersey cow in the Island:** Cattle breeders are constantly looking to improve the quality of their stock and this takes many forms, including the **improvement in production efficiency, the physical conformation of the animals, their resistance to disease etc.**

The methods used for comparative analysis of cattle require minimum numbers of animals to ensure reliable data and the **Island population has already fallen below the critical number.** If we carry on as we are, in a closed herd, the dairy farmers in the Island will be unable to access reliable information about the breeding value of their cattle with severe consequences for the future.

The small size of the Island population means that **the only reliable way of achieving improvements is through utilising the best Jersey breeding bulls available in the world** so as to be a part of what is now a global cattle breeding community.

A pertinent example of the improvements that can be made comes from comparative studies between the Island and the UK which show that within similar conditions **the Island Jersey cow is, on average, some 17% to 20% less productive than UK Jersey cattle and this deficit is worsening annually** as the UK has access to the best breeding bulls available. Comparisons with other populations show that the Island is even further behind.

2. **To improve farm efficiency:** Improving the genetic efficiency of the cattle directly improves the overall efficiency of milk production on farms which in turn **leads to improved profitability for farmers and ultimately more competitive milk prices for consumers.**

There are many conclusive studies that demonstrate the improvements in financial performance that result from advanced breeding programmes and in the local situation the States of Jersey Livestock Adviser has demonstrated that **significant financial improvements will be achieved over time through importing genetics.** The survival of the Jersey herd in the Island depends on it becoming as competitive as possible.

3. **Recognition of the wishes of the majority of dairy farmers who want to import semen:** The RJA&HS has, upon request, conducted two polls of dairy farmers in the last two years, as **it is the current dairy farmers who are affected by this proposal** rather than farmers who are retired, not even in the Island and in some instances both. These polls produced a similar result in that **60% of dairy farmers wish to use imported semen and they are responsible for breeding some 75% of the Island herd.**

The Council is aware that a minority group are against the import of semen, however, it should be noted that their wish to only use Island bred bulls would not be affected in any way by allowing importation of bull semen. Conversely, **not allowing import would severely affect the rights of the majority who wish to use the best pedigree Jersey bulls from around the world.** It is also understood that the current law may potentially pose an anomaly with superior EU legislation.

4. **Importing semen is a key part of the industry recovery plan:** It is well documented that the dairy industry has been through challenging times in the last few years, and in response the Jersey Milk Marketing Board published a 'road map to recovery' in 2003

which specifically recognised that the **importation of genetics is a vital tool in the recovery programme**. The marketing strategy of Jersey Dairy in promoting value added products from the Island will not be compromised as long as the pedigree status is maintained, which it will be.

In addition the States commissioned a review of the dairy industry by agricultural consultants, Promar, who agreed with Dr Bichard and concluded that *“there is a need for better genetics to survive”*. Further more the States of Jersey Economic Affairs Scrutiny Sub-Panel, reporting in 2007, recognised *“the cumulative financial benefits of using imported genetics”*.

5. **To restore confidence in the future**: The dairy industry is on the verge of committing substantial investment in the new dairy and farm infrastructure to improve its competitiveness and, should the importation of genetics not be allowed, there is no doubt that confidence in the future will be damaged, further productive capacity will be lost to the point that the Island will no longer be self sufficient in milk supply. **Importing genetics will boost the confidence of the current farmers to invest for the future.**

The Council recognises that there is a minority of dairy farmers who are opposed to importing semen, and as has been explained there would be no compulsion on them to use it. In fact the RJA&HS already has in store a sufficient semen bank from Island bulls to breed their herds for decades to come.

In order to provide objective discussion the Council have examined the arguments put forward by those who oppose semen import and provides, below, a response to them:

1. *“There is no need to produce more milk (from breeding more productive cows) as there is too much milk already”*: This is not the case, the current supply to Jersey Dairy is now just sufficient to guarantee an all year round supply of milk for the local liquid milk market.

There is, in fact, a need to increase the productivity for two reasons;

- Firstly, to expand the sales of value added products in line with the Jersey Dairy marketing strategy.
- Secondly, there is a need to take up the supply of farmers known to be nearing retirement from the industry, this allows for growth of the remaining committed farm businesses. This growth can be achieved without further investment in additional infrastructure and thus profitably is greatly improved by spreading existing overheads across more litres of production.

2. *“Imported semen will not be pure Jersey and so the unique purity of the Island herd will be tainted”*: The herd in the Island will remain unique in that all the cattle will be born in the Island and the **pedigree status of the Jersey Herd book will remain of the highest integrity**.

It is only pedigree that establishes purity, and the RJA&HS holds the Jersey Herd Book for the Island, which is the guarantor of purity. The Herd Book records the pedigree ancestry and other details of the Jersey cattle in the Island, although it should be noted that not all cattle in Jersey are pedigree. **Countries around the world, having imported cattle from the Island, established their own herd books which run on the same principles as the Jersey Herd Book and their pedigree status is not in doubt.**

Notwithstanding this, the Council of the RJA&HS, in preparation for any decision to allow the importation of semen, has recently agreed changes to the Jersey Herd Book Rules that allow for the inclusion of bulls, through imported semen, of at least seven generations pedigree registered and will be subject to internationally recognised safeguards whereby all semen batches will be **DNA tested to confirm parentage**.

A number of people have disingenuously suggested that by importing semen the type of Jersey cow will change. This is not so, in fact to the layman **the Jersey cattle in Jersey fields will look exactly as they do now.**

3. *“It will lead to the import of milk”*: This issue is related to EU trade arrangements and the ability to license the import of milk. **The real question is ‘will the ability to license the import of milk be continued in perpetuity by not importing semen’; it is suggested that the answer to this is ‘no’.** The States, in its justification of milk import licensing, cites environmental, heritage and the overall position of import and export of all dairy products as being equally important reasons to maintaining the existing arrangements as the preservation of the Jersey breed in its Island home.
In addressing this question it is relevant to quote the conclusion of the States of Jersey Economic Affairs Scrutiny Sub-Panel which said of the possibility of milk import that *“this is not considered to be a valid reason to refuse to import genetics”*.
4. *“A change in the law would allow other breeds into the Island”*: It is true that a change in the law would not be restricted to only allowing importation of Jersey semen. That said the **pedigree Jersey herd would remain protected and indeed strengthened** as the Jersey Dairy rules of supply insist that herds are fully registered in the Jersey Herd Book. It is possible that some beef breed semen may be used in a limited way but this is consistent with the States of Jersey Rural Economy Strategy which seeks to diversify agricultural production and would compliment the investment already made in the abattoir. **All cattle in the Island are recorded by the Society and full traceability can be assured.** In Guernsey some 70 beef cross animals are raised each year for the local beef market and the integrity of the pedigree Guernsey herd is not affected by this.

In conclusion it is interesting to note the experience of cattle breeders in the Island of Guernsey, who, for different reasons, allowed the importation of genetics some 30 years ago. Today it is widely recognised that the best herd of Guernsey cattle in the world is in Guernsey, and that Island plays a leading role in the development of the breed around the world. The only milk producing cattle in the Island are Guernseys and their local milk market is supplied by the local herd.

The development of the Jersey breed since 1833 has been the result of the initiatives of the RJA&HS and successive generations of forward looking cattle breeders. **Indeed it is the earnest desire of the RJA&HS to see the Island of Jersey once again being at the centre of international Jersey cattle breeding.**

For further information or to discuss these points in more detail please contact any of the following:

Paul Houzé
Council Member
for Breed Improvement
Tel: 853416

James Godfrey
Chief Executive
RJA&HS
Tel: 866555

Royal Jersey Agricultural & Horticultural Society
Royal Jersey Showground
Trinity
Jersey
JE3 5JP