

Blade Farming unveils scheme to boost dairy farmer incomes and to prevent the shooting of male calves at birth

Beef from the dairy herd supplies more than 50% of cattle processed in the UK but some 2,000 Holstein male dairy calves are killed each week, at or shortly after birth, because their body conformation is not suited to beef production.

Following 18 months of genetic assessments and research Blade Farming, the company that has pioneered the UK's first integrated beef supply chain, has developed a scheme to help dairy farmers improve the beef qualities of the pure Holstein male dairy calves born on their farms.

Richard Phelps, Blade Farming's Managing Director explains, 'Blade Farming buy thousands of Holstein bull calves each month. We commissioned research to identify the sires of calves that were found to produce good beef. As a result we are now recommending eight bulls to dairy farmers as Blade Star Sires.

'Farmers using semen from one of these bulls will gain either a good dairy heifer replacement or a male dairy calf that will give a good return. The whole objective of the scheme is to increase the value of the calves, benefit British farming and create a viable alternative to shooting for the dairy farmer.'

The research into 'Blade Star Sires' was carried out by Paul Westaway, a beef farmer who worked with a leading breeding company for nine years and who is currently chairman of the British Cattle Breeders Club. Westaway advises, 'Data shows that some farms produce over 90% of Holstein bull calves that are suitable for beef production while others the number can be as low as 5%. There are two main factors, providing adequate colostrum for the first three days of life and the genetic makeup of the sire and dam of the calf

'Detailed analysis of a thousand calves has shown that bulls that sire calves suitable for beef production have some genetic traits in common. In association with Professor Jeff Wood of Bristol University we developed a formula to identify the bulls that are now the 'Blade Star Sires'. We also set minimum criteria for production, type, lifespan and somatic cell count so that dairy farmers do not compromise the qualities they need in their heifers for future milk production.'

Blade Farming has been involved with Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA on the Beyond Calf Exports Stakeholders Forum along with other key industry players. The objective of the forum has been to find welfare friendly and economically viable options to keep black and white male dairy calves within the UK's beef or veal production supply chain rather than exporting them or killing them at or shortly after birth.

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming says, 'Blade has been very active within the forum and is to be congratulated for identifying ways that dairy farmers can improve calf quality so that they can be reared and given a good life on British farms instead of being killed at or shortly after birth.'

David Bowles, RSPCA's Head of External Affairs says, "We welcome this initiative and believe that schemes such as this that have been developed through the Calf Forum, can be of long-term benefit to the UK beef and dairy industry as well as boosting calf welfare."

Farmers who purchase semen from 'Blade Star Sires' will be supplied with an additional ear tag for the calves – an orange tag with embossed star, the herd number and individual Blade ID.

The eight bulls being recommended to dairy farmers are: **Leif** - Bullsemen.com; **Wa-del Junction** – Genus Breeding; **Ked Outside Jeeves** – Genus Breeding; **Levin** – Bullsemen.com; **Regancrest RBK Diehard** – Genus Breeding; **Lisleview Mtoto Lethal** – Bullsemen.com; **Jelto** – Bullsemen.com; **Jeffana Outside Voyage** – Genus Breeding.

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