1-1-1972

Meat from the dairy herd

R.A. Bettenay
IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

This document has been obtained from DAFWA’s research library website (researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au) which hosts DAFWA’s archival research publications. Although reasonable care was taken to make the information in the document accurate at the time it was first published, DAFWA does not make any representations or warranties about its accuracy, reliability, currency, completeness or suitability for any particular purpose. It may be out of date, inaccurate or misleading or conflict with current laws, polices or practices. DAFWA has not reviewed or revised the information before making the document available from its research library website. Before using the information, you should carefully evaluate its accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance for your purposes. We recommend you also search for more recent information on DAFWA’s research library website, DAFWA’s main website (https://www.agric.wa.gov.au) and other appropriate websites and sources.

Information in, or referred to in, documents on DAFWA’s research library website is not tailored to the circumstances of individual farms, people or businesses, and does not constitute legal, business, scientific, agricultural or farm management advice. We recommend before making any significant decisions, you obtain advice from appropriate professionals who have taken into account your individual circumstances and objectives.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the State of Western Australia and their employees and agents (collectively and individually referred to below as DAFWA) accept no liability whatsoever, by reason of negligence or otherwise, arising from any use or release of information in, or referred to in, this document, or any error, inaccuracy or omission in the information.
Beef raising is a profitable sideline for many West Australian dairy farmers and gives their farming operation flexibility and versatility. With suitable management and feeding the weight gains and consumer acceptance of dairy beef allow it to compete strongly with beef from other sources. The breeds most common on W.A. dairy farms are well suited to beef production.

In contrast to the situation in many other countries, the dairy industry in Australia is not the main beef producer. Australia and New Zealand have separate beef industries based on traditional beef breeds. In the United Kingdom, 72 per cent. of the home-produced beef comes from the dairy herd as
Unless Channel Island breeds are mated to beef bulls, they do not produce calves which can be economically reared as beef.

Multiple suckling by mothering-up is not a common calf rearing practice in W.A.

Cattle numbers in W.A.

The most recent figures on cattle numbers in W.A. are shown in Table 1. The importance of the dairy herd as a source of meat depends on what happens to the calves and to the culled cows. In the dairying areas, 35 per cent. of the total number of cows and heifers older than 12 months are kept for milk production (Table 1). For the whole State, 15 per cent. of cows and heifers older than 12 months are kept for milk production.

What happens to dairy calves

During 1969-70 all Australian States, except Queensland, were surveyed to find the types of calves born on dairy farms and what happened to them. In W.A., the survey was done by Dairying Division officers and information was collected from 152 dairy farms, about 11 per cent. of the total.

A report of this national survey has now been published.* The findings show important differences between W.A. and the Australian average.

• W.A. has more “heavy” breed cows than the Australian average—67 per cent. compared to 43 per cent. (Item 3 in Table 2).
• Only 10 per cent. of the dairy cows in surveyed herds in W.A. were mated to, or inseminated with semen from, light breed dairy bulls. (Australian average was 43.3 per cent.; items 4 to 6.) Probably all but 10 per cent. of the dairy calves born in this State were suitable for meat production.
• Less than 6 per cent. of dairy calves born alive in W.A. were sold for slaughter when less than 3 weeks old. This is in marked contrast to the Australian figure of 46.1 per cent. (Item 11 (a)).
• More of the young calves changing hands in W.A. were intended for rearing on for meat or dairying than in other States. Almost one-fifth of the calves born alive on survey farms in this State were sold for further rearing. (Item 11 (b)). This is open to some interpretation as few farmers selling calves through the saleyards knew whether the purchaser intended them for slaughter or rearing. However, the ruling price for all of the heavier breed steers was such that butchers could not compete with the rearer.
• The percentage of heifers reared on the farm as replacements (Item 14 (c)) was 38.9 per cent. in W.A. compared to the Australian average of 31.2 per cent. As not more than 30 per cent. should be required to maintain herd numbers, this suggests either an unusually high culling rate or that farmers were increasing herd size. Herd size was increasing and also some later selection was probably intended on growth and appearance with poorer milking types intended for mating to beef bulls to rear calves.
• More than 40 per cent. of dairy calves born in Western Australia were reared on the property for beef. This is in marked contrast to the Australian figure of less than 14 per cent. (Item 14 (d)).

The dairy herd’s value to the beef industry
Surplus dairy calves and cull dairy cows go straight to the meat industry. About 24,000 cull dairy

Friesian calves eating barley to supplement a single daily ration of reconstituted skim milk. They are an excellent source of beef.
cows are slaughtered in W.A. each year. It also provides surplus heifers for mating to beef bulls as the start of separate beef herds. Recently, Friesian bulls have been used in beef herds to increase the milking ability of the dam and so give greater early growth of the calves.

**Dairy breeds suitable for meat**

There is ample evidence that all dairy breeds produce meat of acceptable taste and tenderness, although there is some prejudice against the yellow fat of the Channel Island breeds. Pure lines of Channel Island and Ayrshire breeds do not gain weight as fast as heavier breeds and are usually unpopular with butchers, who expect a lower dressing out percentage. For these reasons there is little profit in rearing straight lines of these breeds for meat and surplus bull calves are generally sold soon after birth. Where these breeds are still common, the cows whose calves are not needed as dairy replacements are usually crossed to either Friesians or Charolais, or to Herefords. The number in W.A. is now so small that crossing of Channel Island breeds to Charolais will have little overall effect in increasing beef supplies.

Little has been recorded of the beef potential of the Australian Illawarra Shorthorn (AIS), but they have been popular for beef in W.A. for many years, not only as straight bred but also when crossed with Herefords. Many of our beef herds originated from AIS cows a few generations ago.

Recognition and exploitation of the beefing ability of Friesians has been an outstanding world development in recent years. Research in many countries has shown that Friesians are capable of rapid growth rates and high feed conversion efficiency and lean meat production. This is something which the W.A. dairy farmer has known for some time and has been exploiting to use surplus pasture.

The beef potential on W.A. dairy farms is being very well exploited, with little slaughter of potentially valuable meat animals as very young calves.