

CALF PATHWAYS PROJECT

Regional Group Terms of Reference

Background

Increasing interest and attention on production practices across Australian agricultural industries continues to intensify. The Dairy Industry has identified key risks to maintaining community trust and has a portfolio of research, development, extension and stakeholder engagement programs in place to address these risks. A key priority is improving animal wellbeing which primarily encompasses animal health and welfare.

A key animal welfare risk identified is pathways for male calves. To date, efforts to improve the management of male dairy calves have been largely focused on improving welfare during early life slaughter and improving the financial viability of dairy beef and veal pathways. Whilst investment in these areas continues, it is unlikely that technical improvements alone will 'solve' the problem.

Dairy farming is part of the South Coast economic and social system. No part of the dairy supply chain works in isolation and it should be recognised that changes in one part of a system impact other parts. When it comes to the management of male calves, challenges and opportunities often have national commonalities but also have specific differences that are unique at a local level. As such, designing local solutions should take a holistic approach and involve local industry and supply chain participants directly to co-design viable solutions.

The project

Recognising the complexity of addressing animal wellbeing challenges in a dairy region and the connections and potential impacts within and outside of the industry, a process that includes both dairy industry and wider community members from the South Coast will be undertaken.

The project will support the exchange of local information for the South Coast dairy industry, unpack the complexity of the challenge in the region, identify knowledge gaps and develop proposal(s) for local projects that provide viable alternatives to early life processing and at birth euthanasia for male calves. The second phase of the project will provide funding to implement these proposal(s) in the local region.

The regional differences that contribute to viable options for male calf pathways and the interconnection of issues in dairy regions including seasonality, proximity to meat processors, transport, market options and infrastructure will be explored and local solutions will be developed by local industry participants.

The project will use a 'collaborative design framework', whereby a local group of industry stakeholders will participate in a series of four facilitated workshops and through deliberation arrive at socially acceptable and financially viable alternatives to early life slaughter of male calves. This approach does not predict an outcome, but rather uses a process to enable regionally appropriate options to be developed, tested and refined with community groups and end market partners.

Objective

The objective of the South Coast dairy calf pathways project is to:

Develop and implement pathways for non-replacement calves that meet the economic and social needs of the dairy supply chain while being acceptable by the community.

Regional Group

Central to the South Coast Dairy Calf pathways project is the South Coast Regional Group. The Regional Group will comprise 24 South Coast residents and technical experts that are connected to the dairy industry. Participants will include:

- Dairy farmers (a mixture of sizes and corporate and family)
- Dairy consultants (i.e. vets, agronomists)
- Community voice (i.e. animal wellbeing experts, ethicists)

The group will meet four times between February 2021 and August 2021 and will be guided through a 'collaborative design process'. This process will be used to explore barriers and opportunities in the South Coast dairy system, test assumptions and explore potential alternative pathways for dairy calves in the region.

Participants in the process will come from the above groups and will bring a range of perspectives and experiences. Participants will be representing their own personal experience and not the perspectives of any organisations they are affiliated with. All participants must be open and prepared to listen and consider others' points of view.

Time Requirements

Four one-day workshops will be held in Nowra in 2021. The tentative workshop dates are outlined below. Participants are required to be available for the first workshop date of the 25th of February.

- 25th Feb 2021
- 29th April 2021
- 3rd June 2021
- 5th August 2021

In addition to attending the four one-day workshops, there will be some reading and correspondence between the second and final workshop. This is anticipated to not be more than half a day between each workshop.

Funding and expenses

The South Coast regional group will be funded by Dairy Australia with co-funding from the NSW Sector Development Grants. Group members will be reimbursed for travel expenses and accommodation as required.

Contact

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