News release

## Opportunity for livestock and dairy farmers to collaborate and beef up the value of Scotland’s calf crop

## Sub-headline

## Picture caption

With the increased use of both sexed and beef semen in dairy herds, there is an opportunity to create a network of dairy farmers and beef finishers that can grow the value of Scotland’s calf crop, diversify their income and improve their margins, according to SAC Consulting, part of Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC).

With sexed semen improving dairy herds year-on-year and effectively removing the lower-value black and white bull calf, Robert Ramsay, Senior Beef Consultant with SAC Consulting, said:

“Farmers are selectively using sexed semen to breed replacement heifers from their best cows, with the rest being put to beef bulls with very high genetic merit to produce beef calves that when finished, meet processor specification, helping to diversify farm income.

“Many large retailers are phasing out butcher counters, and the reality is that they’re looking for smaller 350kg carcase beasts, which produce a cut that is consistent for standard packaging, and the dairy bullock that finishes at 320kg to 350kg deadweight fits perfectly into that regime.”

In Scotland, losing a lot of beef dairy calves at their lowest value to big finishers in England results in farmers missing out on Scotch Beef PGI premium.

“While milk sales will always make up the majority of dairy farm incomes, the sale of beef calves is of increasing importance on most dairy farms and represents a 13th or 14th milk cheque,” said Robert.

With retailers such as Morrisons now supporting dairy suppliers to sell Belgian and British Blue cross calves into Buitelaar Production, the supermarket’s beef-rearing partner, there is a market opportunity for dairy farmers, who specialise in milk production, to collaborate with beef finishers to create a new market.

“The elephant in the room is that more than half of the cattle slaughtered in Britain are dairy-bred. There will always be a place for the suckler cow in Scotland, however, as an industry, we need to acknowledge the importance of the dairy sector in providing affordable beef to the market.”

“While the number of dairy herds has fallen, and beef suckler numbers are also in decline, there is an opportunity to develop a more joined up approach to dairy beef production in Scotland. We currently send a large proportion of the beef bred animals from Scotland to Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for rearing and finishing.

“The cattle kill in Scotland is in decline and we need to ensure that we retain a critical mass of cattle in order to allow our beef processing industry to thrive. There are some really good examples of integrated supply chains for dairy beef in Scotland but there is a real opportunity to grow this business significantly in the future.”

**Ends**

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**Notes to Editors:**

[](https://www.sruc.ac.uk/homepage/1148/sign-up_for_sruc_news?utm_source=Outlook%20Signature&utm_medium=email)

Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) was established in 2012 through the merger of the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) with Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge Colleges. Through these institutions, we can trace our lineage back over 100 years.

Today, SRUC is on a journey to become Scotland’s enterprise university at the heart of our sustainable natural economy.

Our mission is to create and mobilise knowledge and talent – partnering locally and globally to benefit Scotland’s natural economy.

To achieve this, we draw upon SRUC’s longstanding strengths in world-class and sector-leading research, learning and teaching, skills and training and consultancy (through SAC Consulting).

A natural economy is fuelled by responsible use of our natural resources: people, land, energy, water, animals and plants. It is an n interlinked, shared, living system that creates opportunities and prosperity. It is multi-scale, dynamic and resilient through creative management and mindful custodianship.

By focussing on the sustainable natural economy, SRUC will strive to lead the way in delivering economic, social and environmental benefits for all, in Scotland, and beyond.