

STATES OF JERSEY

Corporate Services Sub-Panel Proposed Importation of Bovine Semen

FRIDAY, 20th JUNE 2008

Panel:

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman)
Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour
Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

Witness:

Mr. V. Pallot

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman):

We will not be able to hear you, unfortunately, on the recording unless you come and sit in the hot seat, but we promise we will be gentle with you and I will not let them interrupt you, do not worry. There will be no question of being heckled from behind. **[Laughter]**

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, I suppose you have gathered I must be the only person or rather in the minority. Everybody is for and I must be the only one here against the importation.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Well, there are others, I can assure, you, that are similarly against and we are here to listen to all sides of the argument.

Mr. V. Pallot:

First of all, I disagree with Mr. Frigot, I think the Jersey in Jersey is a separate breed. I do not see any reason why there should not be a New Zealand Jersey or an American Jersey or a Danish Jersey. They are all [developing their own DNA genes^[1]].

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Why do you think that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, different countries have got different circumstances. I mean, New Zealand, I think, is a country

where the cattle have to do a lot of walking hence I imagine that is why they have gone for the leg size of the gene, so to speak, and I imagine in Canada a lot of cattle spend a lot of time indoors [they have concentrated on food intake genes^[2]]. If you remember Stewart Mourant started a herd, all the cattle were indoors and they went out together to forage whether it was grass or whatever, and the whole herd, I think, some 200 cows, were fed indoors. But if I remember rightly, certain sections of the community, called the animal rights section, began to see what was going on and started disagreeing with methods.

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Mr. Pallot, can I ask you, how far do you go back with the Jersey, the Island Jersey?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, my grandfather started off with a herd of Jerseys and my father took over then, in due course. My father was born in 1904. We have had Jerseys at home since 1904, at least.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Right, fine. So can I just ask you, obviously you know my knowledge of cattle is limited, you said about the different traits in the American, the Canadian and New Zealand because they have to walk. What I have been told by other people is that Jersey cows used to have straighter legs or better udders and that they are now not as good as they used to be. Have you seen a change over the years in the Island Jersey?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, I have attended most local shows and over the years I have seen that the emphasis has been put on production as apart from the good-looking cows [or conformation^[3]], so to speak. When the war ended and the English breeders came over to restock, as it were, at that time they were looking for a beautiful cow [to win in the showring], they were not worried about milk production. They used to come to the cattle shows by the 100 and it was the good-looking cow that won on show points, those sorts of cows they went for and those were the cows they bought and paid big money for. So, of course, the local breeders concentrated on the look of the cow but then as times changed the emphasis began to be taken away from the good-looking cow as exports fell off and farmers had to start paying [the bills on milk production] -- the local farmers were not making the money they were making so they turned to the production side and ever since then the Jersey breeders have gone for production and they sort of more or less let the good-looking cow go by the wayside [they put the emphasis on milk production and milk recording^[4]]. But, you know, nevertheless, some breeders, I would say, still bred for showtype. They wanted a beautiful looking cow; like the model cow at the Town Hall meeting the other night, and went for production as well. Like everything else, diversity. Some breeders were only interested in production; some were only interested in the beautiful cow, the winning show ring cow, and others wanted both. Farmers go for what they prefer.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Did your grandfather and your father export cattle?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, all over the world.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

All over the world. So a lot of your cattle that your ancestors ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, some are in South Africa.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So they have gone to provide input to these Jersey herds.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, mainly South Africa. Turkey, Denmark, many places.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Do you not have a concern that the rest of the world does not now want our Island Jersey, or do you disagree with that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

No. I disagree. It is a natural progress. I mean, the numbers, the more cattle there are in any country, the more they are bound to have figures way above ours. We are left with the original breeding capacity, so to speak, the original gene pool and in my view, those genes are still here. All these heifer calves we are slaughtering at birth, those wanted genes are in some of these heifer calves. It is just a case of identifying which ones we can save and that is why I was most interested in Dr. Curt Van Tassel, the leading geneticist. I think they intend completing the bovine genome round about October/November time and I would be very interested to see what comes out of that. [5]

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

If your cattle went all around the world, we have heard from previous witnesses and we have heard from various places, the confirmation that the controls on the herd book, on the breeds, all around in the different countries in the world, certainly what we are being told is that the controls are equally as good as Jersey Islands herd books and what have you. Do you go along with that? Do you agree with that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

No, I do not. Human nature being what it is, we all make mistakes. Sometimes we make a mistake on purpose and sometimes we make a genuine mistake and a lot of these countries have used, what they call, upgrading [from non pedigree dams^[6]].

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

We have heard about the upgrading.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes. Well, I think hidden in some of these pedigrees. ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So you distrust ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

I do [not necessarily distrust but a genuine mistake in pedigrees^[7]].

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You distrust the rest of the world's herd books effectively, is what you are saying.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes. Nothing is perfect in this world, you may agree with or not. Even our local herd book has mistakes [due to German Occupation Rules^[8]]. There was a cow, Daffodil of Les Arches, which was shipped to England and she was not Daffodil of Les Arches. She was from Mr Morel's breed, the Jersey Leaf strain. Anyway, the buyer thought she was "Daffodil of Les Arches", as it was registered in the herd book, and she did very well in England. In fact, she was champion at the London Dairy Show at Earls Court. Now, to me ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

She was not who she said she was. She was an impostor.

Mr. V. Pallot:

To me it did not matter too much because one or 2 local breeders knew the real pedigree of that cow and they adjusted their breeding to suit that. In other words, they bred to Mr Morel's family line knowing that it was not a Les Arches family line they should be breeding to. You know, human nature; this has been going on since time indefinite but the fact is, she was typical pure breed Jersey. You follow? Even coming to the cow stable in the morning, you sometimes found perhaps 3 cows have calved during the night and the 3 heifer calves are wandering about. Now, which calf belongs to which mother, you see?

They have to be registered, so you think, well, probably that one is the mother; probably that one and you register them as you think. Now, to me, that would be a genuine mistake but those 3 calves were related. They were the same family in that farm herd, so tracing back the pedigree; it went back to 2 pedigrees, again because the grandparents or the great-grandparents were the same. [That family is still pure^[9].] That is the way I see it. So that is why I am really interested in what is happening with this genome that Dr. Curt Van Tassel is working on and personally, I think we should just wait till there is a little more known about these things. He may confirm there is a DNA difference between Jerseys in other countries to the DNA we have left here in Jersey.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Yes; I think what you are talking about there is the conservation of any specialities or special features that may be in the gene pool in the breed at the moment.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, well, I am afraid with importing; if they do import the semen, that they would be importing perhaps something that we do not need; for instance, importing a larger cow which we do not want. I think all these facts and figures we have been quoted this morning are all very well but they are the result of one lactation on one specific cow. I think everything should be based on the production per area of land. I mean, if you can get 3 Jerseys to an acre as opposed to 2 Holsteins, to me that is an advantage. If you have 3 cows and you lose 2, the third one may be in calf and drop a bull calf, so you are saved, but if you only have 2 and they both die, if they are Holsteins, you have nothing left. [There is still strength in numbers.^[10]]

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Any more on your ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

For a start, we hear that the Jerseys are one inch shorter than in England. The Jersey Jerseys are one inch shorter. They are not so tall and to me, that is an advantage. To me, we want a smaller cow; not a larger one.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

An inch but does it ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

I know but it is a trend, you know, it is a trend. I mean, over the years ... [has the genome changed?^[11]]

Deputy J.A. Martin:

You think they are going to get bigger but, at the moment, the record is an inch.

Mr. V. Pallot:

It is. It could be worse. It could be going the wrong way and as to Guernsey cows getting depleted, I put it down to the fact that Jersey cows are much prettier looking than the Guernsey cows.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You think it is nothing to do with the traits or the batches. You think they just look prettier.

Mr. V. Pallot:

It may well be but there is certainly the difference in looks in my opinion. You can well understand buyers after the war choosing the Jersey as opposed to the Guernsey.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I do not think you are going to find much opposition with that viewpoint.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Of course, Jerseys have come to the fore simply because they produce more fat and protein compared to other breeds. To me, it is a natural progression and the disease aspect of things, especially cell count in the milk, the United Kingdom has probably a lower cell count because the mean temperature is lower. It is always in the hot weather you get trouble in the cattle world. The milk goes sour so quickly for a start. If you remember, the downfall of the Jersey Milk Marketing Board was they were delivering Monday's milk on a Friday at one time and, of course, people were buying a carton which they thought was fresh from the shop and inside, it was already solid. I see now that they want to build a new dairy up at the Howard Davis Farm. I mean, we have a fantastic showground up at the Howard Davis Farm. It is in, what we call, the countryside and it is quiet and they want to put a dairy there, right touching our showground with heavy vehicles going in and out and noise, steam and all the rest of it, when they already have enough area at Five Oaks to build a new dairy. If you only want to move from Five Oaks, just to get rid of the bank loan. To me, I think it is up to the government to help in that way [by paying off the loan^[12]].

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Of course the dairy is owned by the farmers themselves, so when you are saying me, it is you, is it not?

Mr. V. Pallot:

No, it is not. It is the States' responsibility because they have had States representation on the milk marketing board over the years and it was those States representatives that should have pulled the plug and said: "Look here, this cannot go on."

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So you are making the case there should be public money involved to bail out the dairy; is that right?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, yes, to put it bluntly. I think you should pay for your sins. **[Laughter]**

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Following up on that, given that there would appear to be a way of financing the farmers, because they are the ones involved with the dairy, out of their financial problems by moving from Five Oaks, do you not think they should bail themselves out rather than rely on the States?

Mr. V. Pallot:

To think that the milk industry can pay its own way, I think is asking too much. I mean, we have a good man doing the milk costings, Mr. Jackson; he would be hard to replace. **[Laughter]** I think Mr. Jackson has done a great job and with a close scrutiny of the milk production costs in Jersey, and it has to be transparent, I think we could take the public with the farmer ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I understand what you are saying. What is your view on the fact that in the 21st century there is a quite large, and some people would say, fairly large requirement for investment in dairy farms; would you think that the kind of situation where the dairy industry is dependent upon public money, which is, I think, the case you are making, how would you feel? Would you be prepared to invest fairly large sums of your own money into a business that was dependent, for the longer term, on public money; bearing in mind the politics you are always going to have, be then subject to political arguments over the longer term? How would you feel as a dairy farmer on investing your own money in the dairy industry on that basis?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, a lot of farmers did invest in the original building of the dairy. When Mr. Carl Jenson brought up the plans and looking to the future when they bought out the local dairies, a lot of farmers did invest their own money.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

In the old days.

Mr. V. Pallot:

In the old days and, you know, I still think that is possible, but on the other hand, government cannot

expect an industry like a milk industry to thrive in Jersey without government help. I mean, we want a thriving financial industry which is bringing a huge amount of money to the Island and I think it is only fair that while we have a finance industry of that calibre, a certain amount should be, ring fenced, I think is the word, to help the milk supply of the local population; a reasonable amount which Mr. Jackson, I would imagine, could prove was transparent and fair. I am sure the general public are behind us.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Could I just ask, Mr. Pallot, you said that different farmers looked for different emphasis in the way that they steered the way the breeding of their cows went. Some went for production of more milk and some went for looks and so on. Would you describe where your feelings on the scale of ...?

Mr. V. Pallot:

We were inclined to go for both. We wanted a good looking cow but we did not want to lose her good looks just for the sake of increasing the milk production. I find over the last 15 to 20 years, we have lost the beautiful Jersey head we had. Now, I find our cows today are much longer in the nose and I think that is due to breeding for production and giving way to the better looks of the animal. That is left to the individual breeder. He has different bulls to choose from and if he wants to bring back the beautiful head, he could have the breed to the bulls that will do that. That is the pleasure and the art of breeding and farming, so to speak. I mean, I think I saw a picture the other day of 6 cloned heifers, young heifers looking absolutely identical. You know, do we want to go that way? Do we want nothing bad but all perfect? I think we are trying for the impossible.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Thank you.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Would it be fair to say even if the government did increase some sort of subsidy to the farmer, to sell it to the public, it would have to be on the basis that the farmer was getting as good an amount of milk out of his herd as possible and then the subsidy would kick in? Are we sure that is the way we would only be able to sell it to the public?

Mr. V. Pallot:

On a quota system, I would think it could be worked on a quota system that the farmer would be guaranteed to get a slightly above cost of production but only on a small quota of milk to secure or to supply the local population with liquid milk. You know, coming back to another reason why I am here, I feel that Mr. Quenault seems to be making a success of his own dairy. He seems to have the whole lot. He is making cheese, selling milk and I would think another half a dozen farms similar to that one, preferably in the east, of course, less competition for Mr. Quenault, and I think that would be the way to

go; have a few more farms like that supplying the public with fresh milk and other things rather than spoil our showground up there with a new dairy in the wrong place, in my view. I think smaller herds should be encouraged rather than let herds get fewer and larger. I think it is detrimental. I think you ought to devise some method of helping the smaller herds, perhaps 60 to 100 head each at the most. I am not decrying the larger herds at present but these larger herds must not be allowed to succumb. I mean, I heard this morning that they are not making any money at the moment but that can change. You know, I think things are beginning to look up now. In England, the weak ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

What do you think of the environmental pressures on dairy farming, where farmers have to invest in slurry stores and all of these kinds of things now? What is your view on that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, if the authorities insist, I mean, I know I am a bit out of touch now but I understand that they want slurry now stored above ground as opposed to slurry pits. I may be wrong, I am not too sure, but, you know, if the powers that be insist on slurry being stored above ground in tanks or whatever they have in mind, the government must expect to help the farmer to carry out these investments. I mean, even if the farmers have to pay back; let them pay it back on a very low interest over a long, long period of time, but the government must help. In my view, you cannot expect these herds to sink hundreds of thousands of pounds now because the costs of things are so prohibitive now.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Is there any new item we have not covered so far, Mr. Pallot? I think we have covered a lot of things. Rather than repeat them, I am looking for any new topic.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Something new. I was sorry that Mr. Walker, the Chief Minister, promised to have this debated in the States in the pretty near future.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

We go into summer recess on 18th July.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes. I was sorry he put that last date. I think we could wait a little bit longer. To me, it is such a far reaching decision to make after all this time.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Could you tell me what you think we would gain by waiting?

Mr. V. Pallot:

We could evaluate Dr. Curt Van Tassel's genome completion. We could see a lot more about bull semen in October/November [when the genome is complete^[13]]. I mean, I cannot see the industry collapsing just because we wait just a few more months or even a year. You know, I think we are rushing it a bit.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I understand what you are saying but what do you say to those within the industry that would say, if we lose 2 or 3 big herds, that we will very quickly get to the point where we simply will not have enough liquid milk and then we would have to start importing milk, and once we start to import milk, then the dam is broken?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, I think that will come. If we allow semen in, we are going to have to allow French liquid milk in before very long and we are going to have beef breeds; they are going to import embryos, I know it is an expensive item, but unless you have a written cast iron document from the E.U. (European Union) that we can maintain things as they are, they will just push us aside and we cannot compete with imported French milk; no chance, in my view. That is why the government must give these big farmers an assurance that you will come to their aid; that you will not let them succumb. If some of these big producers are put into their herd and perhaps I should not mention names, but Mr. Houzé for one and Mr. Perchard for another, you know, the dedication these families have shown, they must not be allowed to succumb. I remember when the former Senator Jean Le Maistre (as President of the Agriculture and Fisheries Committee) was going to give the farming community, I think it was £2 million or £3 million in aid one day and a couple of days later, the whole budget was cut and the carpet was just pulled from underneath them, from under their feet. That must not be allowed to happen again, in my view.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

You just mentioned a couple of big farmers and I think they are both pro importation of those semen and you are against.

Mr. V. Pallot:

I am against, yes.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Even if it was passed in the States, only the farmers who want to use it, will use it.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes, granted.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

If there are farmers here who are really against it or the smaller farmers who do not want to use bull semen, why, in your opinion then, should not the farmers who say: “That is the best way. I want to go with that government subsidy at the moment to try to improve production with imported semen”, what would be your argument against it? It is not going to make everybody use it.

Mr. V. Pallot:

No. In my view, our Jersey breeders are not going downhill. We are just not improving at the rate other countries are improving which, to me, is bound to be with numbers. The thousands of Jersey cows in these countries, they are bound to have ... [higher figures than Jersey. ^[14]]

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I think the Deputy’s question to you, Mr. Pallot, was what would be wrong with those that wanted to use imported semen using it, and those that did not, the smaller farmers; they do not have to? What would be wrong with that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

Well, they would be opening the floodgates to imported French milk. Once you allow semen and embryos in, unless you have a cast iron ... [document from the EU to the contrary we would not be able to compete ^[15].]

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So you are connecting the importation of semen with the similar importation ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes and embryos and beef embryos.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

What you are worried about is that would then undermine the whole of the strain.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes. It will destroy the Jersey as we know it and the same with the Jersey Royal. We are known for that. The Jersey cow and the Jersey Royal, you know, let us be satisfied with that, so to speak. It is like Aesop’s fable; the old dog with the bone looking down in the stream, not satisfied, so to speak, with the marvellous bone he already had in his mouth. He drops it and loses everything.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Do you think that the Jersey farmers, the dairy farmers, the smaller ones that did not want to use imported bull semen, do you think they would carry on using locally sourced semen? Do you think they would do that anyway?

Mr. V. Pallot:

I think they would.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

A proportion of people would do that.

Mr. V. Pallot:

I would be in favour of reinstating Dr. Jim Allen's bull proving scheme. Somehow that really, to my mind, should be reinstated.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Yes, thank you. I do not have any more questions. Deputy, Connétable?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Just one and maybe you will refresh my memory, I think might be relevant. Dr. Curt Van Tassel's genome, with all the straws, was Jersey in that? I mean, I know we added to it. Did we supply straws to that?

Mr. V. Pallot:

I would not be too sure. I would leave that to the experts.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Okay, it is probably an aside. I mean, you said to wait for the results.

Mr. V. Pallot:

Yes. Plus the fact that we have Mr. Quenault not wanting to import. I mean, he is a well known breeder, a top class breeder and the fact that he is against importing means a lot to me as well. I am sorry if I have upset the applecart in any way.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

That is the whole point of hearing you.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Mr. Pallot, unless you have anything else to add ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

Not at the moment. Well, all right, if I can just diverse a little bit or diverge. We should be preparing to fight against an outbreak of foot and mouth disease; by what I call the Charles Gruchy method. I do not know if you remember the vet, Charles Gruchy who, to my mind, saved the Island from the spread of foot and mouth disease and I would like to see a lot more done in this regard. We have a good vet in Linda Loseck and I would like to see something done. Rather than import semen, we should be prepared for an outbreak of foot and mouth disease under the Charles Gruchy method.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You are flagging up what are our ...

Mr. V. Pallot:

Also Bluetongue, you know, that is another instance. We should be monitoring this carrier midge in the Island. That is what we should be concentrating on, in my view. That is all for now.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Thank you very much.

[1] Text added subsequently by the witness

[2] Text added subsequently by the witness

[3] Text added subsequently by the witness

[4] Text added subsequently by the witness

[5] Subsequent comment from witness: I believe he may be able to identify any unwanted recessive genes that could be imported in this foreign semen

[6] Text added subsequently by the witness

[7] Text added subsequently by the witness

[8] Text added subsequently by the witness

[9] Text added subsequently by the witness

[10] Text added subsequently by the witness

[11] Text added subsequently by the witness

[12] Text added subsequently by the witness

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[14] Text added subsequently by the witness

[15] Text added subsequently by the witness