

UK Beef Welfare Strategy 2026-2031

Vision for beef cattle welfare in the UK, by 2031



Foreword

The UK beef sector is one we are rightly proud of. With high levels of stockmanship and an end product which is highly valued, the beef industry is a dynamic and ever evolving part of British agriculture. But that does not mean we can ever rest on our laurels.

This strategy sets out a clear and ambitious vision for a thriving and sustainable beef sector in which high standards of health, welfare and productivity are achieved for every animal across all farming systems. Whether it is our suckler sector and its exceptionally high welfare, or beef from the dairy herd and its low carbon footprint, we have an industry to be proud of.

Central to this vision is the recognition that excellent welfare is inseparable from good stockmanship, robust herd health planning and environmentally and financially sustainable farm businesses. By placing the stockperson at the heart of delivery, the strategy acknowledges that attitudes on farm are the primary drivers of positive welfare outcomes.

The strategy is built around six key themes: high health and welfare management, thriving stock, comfortable housing and environments, enhanced handling and stockperson skills, the advancement of positive welfare, and critical health planning. Together, these priorities promote a proactive and preventative

approach, moving beyond the treatment of disease towards systems that enable cattle to be resilient, healthy and able to express natural behaviours.

Improving herd health is a key foundation because it delivers benefits that extend beyond welfare to include reduced environmental impact, more responsible use of medicines and improved farm performance. At the same time, the strategy emphasises the importance of forward planning, collaboration with vets and the integration of welfare considerations at every stage of the production cycle, including transport and end of life.

There is also a strong focus on reputation and public trust. Delivering clear improvements in welfare will be critical to maintaining consumer confidence and securing future market opportunities, both domestically and internationally.

This strategy can be used as the foundation for the ongoing success and development of the beef sector and I would like to say a special thanks to all those who have contributed, signed and supported its development.

Gwyn Jones

Ruminant Health & Welfare chair

A vision for beef cattle welfare in the UK

Our vision for the beef sector pivots around health, welfare and productivity for every animal in the national herd.

A farmed environment prioritising the stockperson's skills, the sustainability of the enterprise and positive animal welfare is key if this vision is to be achieved for every farm and across all farm locations.

Our six goals are:

High health and welfare management	Promoting handling and stockperson skills
Thriving stock	Positive welfare
Comfortable housing and environment	Critical health planning



Chief veterinary officers support the RH&W

For many years, the UK has been renowned for high standards of animal welfare, and we must continue to strive for the highest level of health and welfare across our nations' beef and beef suckler herds if we are to remain leaders.

Across the four devolved nations, we are in full support of the RH&W Beef Welfare Strategy and the six strategic goals identified. It's reassuring to see ambitious actions that the whole beef supply chain can collaborate on.

To be able to evidence the progress made as an industry towards achieving the six welfare goals is of paramount importance. For the strategy to succeed, engagement across all beef industry stakeholder groups will be needed as will the development of infrastructure to measure and record progress.

Higher welfare standards mean greater efficiency within beef herds, a better end product, less reliance on antibiotic usage and lower environmental impacts for the entire sector.

All of these factors will help to ensure the beef sector has a sustainable future.

- Dr Christine Middlemiss, UK Chief Veterinary Officer
- Dr Richard Irvine, Wales Chief Veterinary Officer
- Dr Sheila Voas, Scotland Chief Veterinary Officer
- Mr Brian Dooher, Northern Ireland Chief Veterinary Officer



High health and welfare management

Thriving stock

Comfortable housing and environment

The six strategic goals for the UK beef welfare strategy 2026-2031

Promoting handling and stockperson skills

Positive welfare

Critical health planning

High health and welfare management

The goal is to implement a proactive approach to herd health and welfare management with every farm achieving a tailored management plan for the system, situation and location that complements any statutory disease programs in place. Collaboration between farmers and veterinary professionals and qualified advisers is encouraged, with many farmers already having strong relationships in place. This aids effective, forward-thinking decision making to future-proof herds and ensures robust herd health and breeding planning.

Thriving stock

All beef animals will be bred, reared and cared for to be resilient and robust and to thrive in all types of beef production systems. Breeding plans should support healthy and robust cattle with consideration of key traits like calving ease. Optimal body condition will be achieved for all beef animals throughout the year; with acknowledgement this will vary depending on seasonality. Good body condition reflects that animals' nutritional needs are being met, weather-related challenges are effectively mitigated, and group sizes and stocking densities are appropriately managed, indicating comprehensive and effective herd management practices. Practices should be adopted that support vigour, good nutrition and protection against disease and gastrointestinal parasite burdens, which lead to greater productivity and enhanced responsible medicine use.

Comfortable housing and environment

The comfort of beef cattle in housing and at grazing will be maximised by providing clean and enriched environments that include key elements, such as adequate space, mental stimulation, socialisation opportunities and environmental complexity. Facilities should allow for positive group dynamics through appropriate stocking densities. Every farm should have a proactive pain management plan to optimise the comfort of cattle and aid their ability to prevent and overcome disease, illness and/or injury. Housing and grazing conditions should also factor in resilience to climate change by having a plan to help animals cope with extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and cold spells.

Promoting handling and stockperson skills

The knowledge and skills of stock people are vital to improving beef animal health and welfare. Farms should be proactive in maintaining and enhancing the ongoing training and skills of their staff to ensure they can provide prompt and effective decision making, particularly in relation to early intervention when health is compromised, providing pain relief, and other critical welfare decisions. Stockpersons should be equipped to take full responsibility for herd management decisions related to routine tasks, ensure proper handling of animals using the right equipment to minimise stress and injury, and implement appropriate interventions suited to the production system, all to support positive welfare outcomes.

Positive welfare

Beef welfare practices will be advanced by moving towards 'positive welfare' and ensuring provision of an environment that allows animals to exhibit natural behaviours. Consideration should be taken at every stage of beef production to actively optimise positive welfare, including positive social interactions with other cattle and stress-free handling by humans, comfortable housing, an enriched environment, safe transport and proactive routine herd health.

Critical health planning

On-farm herd health planning, stockperson training and collaboration with the farm vet should lead to rapid detection and treatment of illness or disease, with the result being prompt and effective decision-making for treatment, pain relief and, where necessary, on-farm euthanasia to avoid unnecessary suffering. Provision should also be made to support stockpeople in identifying when emergency euthanasia is necessary and ensuring that it is undertaken humanely and safely. This will safeguard their mental well-being by ensuring they feel confident in arranging for the task to be undertaken, and to minimise stress while maintaining high standards of animal welfare. Planning should encompass clear protocols for the management of all animals at the point of leaving the farm, including loading and transport. Ensuring animals are fit for travel, handled calmly, and transported in appropriate conditions is vital to maintaining welfare standards up to end of life.



Defining animal welfare

Animal welfare relates to an animal's physical health and ability to show natural behaviours and is often referred to in terms of the five domains: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state. These five domains are addressed by the six key goals identified in this strategy.

Health is a pivotal part of overall welfare. However, it is also increasingly recognised that optimising beef cattle welfare involves other important factors in addition to health, such as welfare in transport and care at the end of life. Research shows that the public expects the delivery of good welfare to include more than ensuring good health alone, and UK beef farmers and the industry are in a good position to deliver on both health and welfare.

The opportunities

The strategy will pave the way for the industry to make major progress in the six identified pivotal areas of beef cattle welfare. However, to evidence this, investment will be required in practical methods to report progress and the collation of existing data to show any improvements. The industry must also work together to ensure policy aligns and promotes positive welfare.

Strategy delivery plan

The five-year strategy will be executed taking the following five step approach:

- 1. Engagement** - Commitment by all stakeholders to engage with this strategy and deliver against the six goals
- 2. Dialogue** - Routine delivery of meetings with stakeholder representation to create a dialogue, and move towards developing and coordinating agreed priority SMART* actions for each of the six goals
- 3. Collaboration** - Whole supply-chain collaboration to ensure the strategy is promoted, proactively driven forward and reported against for the benefit of the whole industry
- 4. Evidence** - a) Development of capacity for the collation and delivery of an evidence base
b) Industry-wide tracking of KPIs and centrally collated data to build an evidence base and clearly report annually against the identified actions within each of the six goals
- 5. Progress** - Demonstration of results and progress against the strategy, ensuring the priority actions concerning beef cattle welfare are disseminated right through the industry via knowledge transfer

This five-year UK Beef Welfare Strategy should be viewed in tandem with the [GB Calf Welfare Strategy 2025-2030](#).

**SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound*

Supporters

- Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)
- AIMS
- Animal Health NI
- Boehringer Ingelheim
- British Cattle Breeders Club (BCBC)
- Buitelaar
- British Cattle Veterinary Association (BVCA)
- Calf To Cow Consultancy
- Cargill
- Defra
- Genus ABS
- Hartpury University and Hartpury College
- Hereford Cattle Society
- Hurst Animal Health
- Kingshay
- Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA)
- MSD Animal Health
- National Beef Association (NBA)
- NFU Cymru
- NFU Scotland
- OSI and Pickstock Telford
- Pathway Farming
- Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)
- Red Tractor
- Royal Veterinary College
- RSPCA
- Ruminant Health and Welfare (RH&W)
- Sedgemoor Auction Centre
- Synergy Farm Health
- VetPartners
- Zoetis





Please contact Ruminant Health & Welfare for more information on supporting the UK Beef Strategy 2026-2031

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