WHAT HAPPENS TO THE COW AND HER CALF?

Most people have no idea of the suffering and slaughter involved with the production of milk. Some 'think' that cows just grow milk and that it is kind to relieve them of it. Others understand the role of the calf but believe that it gets its fair share of its mother's milk as it lives happily with her in the green fields. The truth is very far different.

In order to produce milk a cow is made pregnant each year, usually by artificial insemination. Giving birth is often a prolonged and painful business, especially if the semen was from a larger breed of bull likely to sire a bigger beef calf. The pain is followed by the trauma of losing her calf, for it is taken away from her before it is three days old so that the milk produced for it can be sold to humans.

Of course cows vary, as do humans, but in general the maternal instinct is strong in cows - they often cry and search for their babies for days. Professor William Thorpe, animal behaviourist on the Government appointed Brambell Committee of 1965, wrote in its report: *"Separating the calf from the mother shortly after birth undoubtedly inflicts anguish on both. Cattle are highly intelligent and attachment between calf and the mother is particularly strong".*

A story in the national press gave a poignant illustration of this. Two year old Blackie was sent to market with her firstborn calf. They were sold to different farmers and taken to farms seven miles apart. Next morning the farmer who had bought the calf was surprised to find that it had acquired a mother during the night. Blackie had jumped a gate and managed the long trek through the dark to find her baby. The farmer's wife said *"We will buy her. They will stay together! I am a mother myself and can imagine what she felt like".*

Most farmers allow no such imaginings. P C Pick, author of 'Your Own Dairy Cow', warns that the cow and the calf will cry for each other. *"It's a sad sound but having a home cow is about getting milk for the family, so you just have to shut your ears".* However, most cows are not home cows. They are part of unnaturally large herds in our industrialised agriculture where, according to Graham Harvey writing in The New Scientist, 29.9.1983, *"the cow will not find security in an established place in the herd hierarchy. Her agitation will be increased by the absence of any real relationship with the herdsman. She is pressed relentlessly for higher yields of milk. The energy dense rations that support those higher yields produce acid indigestion, and commonly a range of clinical conditions from milk fever to mastitis. Hours spent on concrete floors may cripple the cow: her high energy diet will have predisposed her to lameness. Many dairy farmers rely on antibiotics to hold back the flood of diseases".*

As soon as her milk yield drops the cow is sent to the slaughterhouse - perhaps on the long trek to slaughter overseas.

What effect the new CAP regulations, designed to reduce the embarrassing 'lake' of unwanted milk, will have remains to be seen. They are not likely to benefit the cow.

AND WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CALF?

The baby calves may go straight to the slaughterhouse. The rennet from their stomachs will be used to make cheese. Many may have a worse fate - they will be reared for veal. According to C Pye Smith and R North in 'Working the Land', published 1984 by Temple Smith, the notorious veal crates are being less used (now banned in the UK but not in the EC). In these calves have only a width of 24" in which to 'live'. Long before the end of their 12 week existence they have no room even to turn and groom themselves. The Brambell Report says *"Calves are normally active and playful animals"*.

Rather fewer calves are reared in 'loose boxes', about twenty to a group, for so-called 'welfare-veal'. In these they have room to move, the company of their own kind and straw bedding that they can eat to satisfy the ruminants craving for roughage. At the end of their short lives lies the journey to the violent death in the slaughterhouse.

Calves in the beef herds often have a better time. They are allowed to run with their dams in the fields, but most of the beef produced in the UK comes from cross bred calves out of the Friesian dairy cows. Very few of these graze in the fields. They are crowded together in sheds, deprived of the exercise that would 'waste' their feed, overfed to bring them to slaughter weight as soon as possible.

Some female calves are selected for dairy replacements - to follow their mothers in lives of frustrated pregnancies and stressful over-production of milk.

A few male calves will be reared as bulls. Most will spend their adult lives imprisoned in solitary confinement, their boredom relieved by their being periodically tricked into ejaculating their semen into rubber bags.

And all this cruel exploitation to produce food for humans that is unnecessary and in some ways hazardous. The idea that adults of one species could <u>need</u> the <u>baby food</u> of a very different species would be recognised as ludicrous were the practice not hallowed by habit. Of course, milk can contribute valuable nutrients but none that cannot be supplied by a properly planned vegan diet. This was officially recognised by the US Academy of Science as long ago as 1975 and is now generally accepted by nutritionists and knowledgeable doctors.

Two generations of life vegans have now demonstrated that the vegan diet can support health from conception to adulthood. Elderly men and women are enjoying vigorous health after decades on the diet.

Human babies should be breast-fed. Feeding them on the milk of a very different species deprives them as well as calves of their birthright. Many human mothers secrete far more milk than their own baby needs, so milk banks could provide the proper food for the few babies whose mothers cannot breast feed. Soya milks can be bought easily now, the <u>right brands</u> can be used successfully to rear babies. They are being used in hospitals.

Milk can carry serious infections such as salmonellosis, brucellosis, tuberculosis and campylobacter. Intolerance to it can cause eczema, asthma, tonsillitis and intestinal disturbances, especially in children. Its saturated fat is recognised as a contributory factor to heart disease and strokes - major incapacitators and killers in our culture. Dr Richard Turner,

the heart specialist, has long campaigned against milk fats, and in 'The Times' of 12.6.1984, Sir Douglas Black, President of the British Medical Association, was quoted as saying *"it is nonsense to give it to children in schools"*.

Meat eaters and vegetarians who decide to free themselves from dependence on the cruel exploitation of cows and their calves can get advice on a proper vegan diet from the Movement for Compassionate Living (see Publications page of the website).

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