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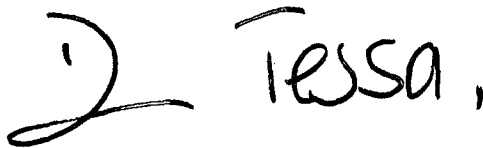
  
**defra**  
Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**Your ref:** 01101152  
**Our ref:** MC177012/LW

 March 2010

**From the Secretary of State**  
The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP



Thank you for your letter of 18 March enclosing an example of an email you received from one of your constituents about proposals for a large scale dairy unit in Lincolnshire.

I am sure you can understand that I am unable to comment on individual planning applications.

All dairy cattle, in whatever system they are kept, are protected by comprehensive animal welfare legislation. In England, the welfare of cattle is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. The Act also contains a duty of care to animals, this means that anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's needs are met. These general requirements are supplemented by more detailed ones in the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 for calves and cattle, covering areas such as accommodation, tethering, inspection, feed and water.


It is important to recognise that poor welfare may occur in both intensive and extensive systems. The most significant influence on the welfare of livestock is the stock-keeper, not the system in which it is reared.

Defra is currently funding a 3 year project by the Scottish Agricultural College which is investigating the management and welfare of continuously housed cows. It will compare the health of cows in continuously housed systems with those in summer grazing systems, by

using culling and fertility data. Work on this research is at an early stage, and is due to be completed at the end of June 2011.

Dairy products contain important elements of a balanced diet, are part of the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Eat Well plate, and a majority of the population consume them. We have a long and proud tradition of producing dairy products to meet this need and believe that this should continue provided we can do so competitively, sustainably, and to acceptable welfare standards.

The UK dairy sector is amongst the most competitive in Europe but, in line with the progressive reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, it also needs to compete globally. Recent pressures, not just in the UK but across Europe, have demonstrated this. So we welcome innovative and entrepreneurial efforts by farmers to improve their competitiveness while protecting the environment and meeting animal welfare standards.

Best Wishes  


**HILARY BENN**