

Horizon Research

Calves and the Dairy Industry

Completed for SAFE

October 2017

SUMMARY

This report summarises the results of online surveys of 1,033 members of Horizon Research's national panels between 9 and 15 October 2017. The sample represents the adult population at the 2013 census and, at a 95% confidence level, the maximum margin of error is of $\pm 3.1\%$ overall.

This is a survey of the **general public**, not a survey only of farmers or those involved in the agricultural sector. Only a small number of respondents described their occupation as "farm owner/manager" or said they were in the "agricultural/forestry" sector.

Overall comment

The overall results suggest a need for the general public to have greater information about the dairy industry, its practices and its scale with respect to calves in order to have an informed opinion. Many were unsure and it is likely that they would therefore be making judgements from an uninformed position.

While there is definitely some concern about calves within the large cities, where respondents are likely to have lower levels of direct contact with dairy farms or farming methods, the concern about the number of 'bobby' calves killed each year and the trust and confidence in the dairy industry to ensure that 'bobby' calves are treated humanely outside the main cities is not a majority.

Calves in dairying

The question of whether cows in the dairy industry needed to give birth to a calf each year if they are to produce milk indicated that many New Zealanders do not have a good understanding of the basics of the dairy industry. 50% of respondents felt that it was true that cows in the dairy industry needed to give birth to a calf each year if they are to produce milk. However, 38% were unsure. In the large cities, 43% thought it was true while 45% were unsure, By comparison, in rural areas without cities, 61% thought it was true, while 28% were unsure.

'Bobby' calf volumes

Asked how many bobby calves they thought were killed in New Zealand each year, 8% of respondents chose the correct "2 million" answer. Most underestimated the volume, suggesting that they may not have a good understanding of the scale of dairying.

82% overall thought that a million or fewer were killed each year with 58% thinking there were 750,000 or less. Because the steps in the options were wide and a small number thought there were 2 million or more bobby calves killed each year, the average thought to be killed was 1 million.

Acceptability of 'bobby' calf kill

Respondents were asked if they thought it was acceptable for the dairy industry to kill the unwanted 'bobby' calves soon after birth.

Only in the large cities did a majority of respondents (68%) feel that this was not acceptable. 58% of respondents in provincial cities and 52% in provincial areas without cities felt that it was acceptable.

Trust and confidence in 'bobby' calf management

Respondents were asked how much trust and confidence they had in the dairy industry to ensure 'bobby' calves were treated humanely.

As with the question of acceptability of bobby calf kill, it was only in the large cities where fewer respondents had confidence in the dairy industry to treat 'bobby' calves humanely than had a lack of confidence in them.

10% overall said they would need to know more to give an opinion.

81% of those who described themselves as farm owners/managers or said they were in the agricultural/Forestry sector had confidence in the sector's ability to ensure the humane treatment of 'bobby' calves.