

SW Dairy Board Update July 2020

The South West Dairy Board (the board) meets every few months to discuss topical issues, respond to consultation requests, identify challenges and opportunities for the sector across the South West and to ensure that views of members are fed up to our national board, via South West board chairman Andrew Branton. To make this process as straightforward as possible, the board meets a week or two ahead of the national board to ensure that Andrew has a clear mandate from members on a range of subjects.

Our last face to face meeting of the board was on the 5th March where the hot topic of the day was management of surplus calves on farm – this was to ensure that the board were fully aware of the upcoming Red Tractor consultation (which can be viewed here https://assurance.redtractor.org.uk/contentfiles/Farmers-7116.pdf?_af637275721242736171) as well as discussing the moves from some processors to adopt policies on calves. Principally looking at euthanasia of surplus dairy bull calves but some also making further restrictions on ages of calves at slaughter.

Board meetings are open to all members but we also encourage members to get in touch with their county representative on the board to raise issues on their behalf. These are farmers elected to the board to represent the members in their county and to provide their insight and experience to the board. If you are unsure who your representative on the board is, please contact the NFU regional office on 01392 440700 or south.west@nfu.org.uk or speak to your County Adviser.

As you will know, shortly after the March board meeting the country went into Covid-19 lockdown. As this happened, we decided to hold regular catch up calls and virtual meetings with board members to ensure that the challenges being felt at the farm gate could be passed on to our HQ and in turn fed in to politicians and policy makers. It was this direct action and feedback that led to the creation of the Dairy Hardship Fund, gained support for a new dairy promotional campaign from AHDB, ensured that government backed bounce back loans were tweaked so that farmers would be eligible to apply and has fed directly into plans for recovery, such as the South West NFU Covid-19 recovery plan: <https://www.nfuonline.com/about-us/our-offices/south-west/south-west-news/looking-to-a-world-after-covid-19/>

We hope that the “normal service” of face to face meetings will be able to happen again soon, but in the meantime, to ensure that the virtual meetings are manageable, the board meetings have been restricted to board members and invited speakers only. Our intention is to hold a more general “open” meeting of the board in Autumn/Winter so that anyone who is interested in finding out more about the work of the board can join in. In the meantime, we are arranging a number of seminars about the recently announced [Defra consultation on dairy contracts](#) that you can join virtually. Please watch NFU SW communications for details.

As we ease out of the initial “emergency” response phase of Covid-19, the board is aiming to focus on some of the key areas of work that were temporarily put to one side while the challenges

presented by the pandemic were playing out. For our last board meeting (6th July 2020) we had hoped to visit the wonderful research farm facility at North Wyke near Okehampton to learn more about the latest data from their Farm Platform and some research they are carrying out to look at the best possible ways to calculate farm carbon footprints – including the ability of different soil types to absorb and store carbon. This type of research work can help us all to become more efficient and to impact less on the environment. But crucially, it also enables us to give an accurate picture of our true carbon footprints of individual farms (or even fields!) when retailers, processors or anyone ask for that information.