

POLICY BRIEF: The role of grazing in imaginaries of an economically viable, environmentally sustainable and high welfare dairy sector.

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1. KEY MESSAGE There is a need for policy makers, farmers and industry stakeholders to discuss the role of grazing in dairy systems in terms of values as well as science. The dominant account of an economically viable, environmentally sustainable and high animal welfare dairy sector in the UK is that no system (pasture based, high input, indoor) is better than another. As a result, key stakeholders did not favour pasture based labels on the market. But the dairy sector in the UK aims to increase market value and product differentiation. It will be difficult to achieve added value differentiation without engaging with reasons why grazing is important in the public imagination. That is not to say that grazing needs to be key to marketing or land management policy in the dairy sector in Scotland. However, the common sense narrative of ‘no system is better than another’ should not prevent policy makers, key stakeholders and farmers from revisiting the potential cultural, environmental and economic importance of grazing in terms of its place in the future Scottish dairy industry.

2. MAJOR FINDINGS There were different accounts of what an economically viable, environmentally sustainable and high animal welfare dairy sector looks like in the UK. The dominant account among key stakeholders was that any system, regardless of grazing practices, can be profitable, sustainable and achieve high animal welfare if it is managed properly. There were more marginal views that indoor, larger and high output systems are optimal or pasture based systems are optimal. The different accounts of the optimal dairy system were underpinned by opposing scientific and empirical claims, which in turn were underpinned by different values.

3. OBJECTIVES The aim of the research was to explore key stakeholder views about the role of grazing in the UK and Irish dairy sectors. It is important to explore the role of grazing in the dairy sector because year round housing has caused controversy and it is a time of change within the dairy industry which has wider implications for the sector and society.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS The Scottish Dairy Review: ‘Ambition 2025’ and the Dairy Action Plan sets targets for increasing milk production by 50% over 10-12 years, ensuring the resilience and profitability of the Scottish dairy industry, and establishing a distinct market identity for Scottish dairy produce. It will be difficult to achieve added value differentiation without engaging with reasons why grazing is important in the public imagination. There is also a need for discussion among policy makers, the public, farmers and industry stakeholders about the role of grazing in the dairy sector in producing public goods.

5. IMPORTANT ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS The study was based on interviews with 25 key UK stakeholders and 18 key Irish stakeholders, and analysis of 38 UK documents and 26 Irish documents. The study was focused on the UK as a whole rather than Scotland. This policy brief just focuses on UK findings.

7. LINKS TO EXISTING PUBLICATIONS OR REPORTS Shortall, O. [Cows eat grass, don't they? Contrasting sociotechnical imaginaries of the role of grazing in the UK and Irish dairy sectors. Journal of Rural Studies 2019](#)