

WHAT ARE CATTLE?

Cattle live in groups called herds. They generally graze during the summer months and are housed during the winter. A female calf that has not given birth and is less than 30 months old is called a heifer. When a heifer has given birth to a calf, she becomes a cow. A male is called a bull and a castrated (neutered) male is called a bullock.



WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF CATTLE?

There are approximately 200 different breeds of cattle in the world today. These can be many different sizes and shapes. Some are better for producing milk and are called dairy cows. For example in Ireland, the most popular dairy cow is the black and white Friesian. Other breeds that are better for producing meat are called beef cattle. Cattle provide us with milk, beef and leather products.

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Products made from milk are generally called dairy products. Cream, butter, cheese and yoghurts are made from milk.



• Cream

When milk is left to stand undisturbed, its fat will float to the surface - the result being **cream**. The cream is separated from the milk by a mechanical separator.

• Cheese

In order to make **cheese**, a starter (a culture of bacteria) and rennet (an enzyme which causes a curd to form) are added to the milk. These separate the milk into curds and whey. The curds are chopped up and pressed together into blocks. The blocks ripen, after a time, into different types of cheeses.

• Butter

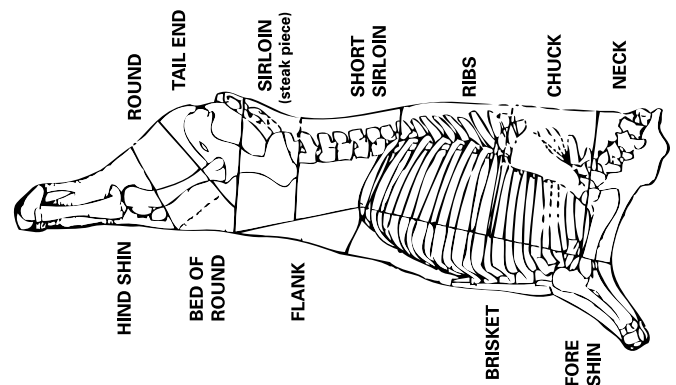
Butter is made from the cream in milk, which is placed in a churn for 30-40 minutes. The churn spins and causes small pieces of butter to float. These are then salted in order to enhance the taste and help preservation.

• Yoghurt

Yoghurt is made when a culture is added to heated milk. In order to make flavoured yoghurts, different kinds of fruits or flavours are added.

BEEF PRODUCTS

Beef is the name given to the meat we get from cattle. We can buy many different types of beef e.g. steak, round beef, minced beef, and burgers.



Irish beef is famous all over the world for being of very high quality. This is mainly due to the fact that almost all Irish beef animals live on a diet of grass, either fresh or in the form of silage and hay.

Leather

Leather comes from cattle skin and is used to make products like jackets, shoes, belts, gloves, rugs and furniture coverings.

WHERE DO CATTLE LIVE?

There are two main types of cattle housing used in Ireland – slatted houses and straw bedding. The former is made up of concrete slats that are designed to allow the cattle to remain clean and the slurry to pass through the tanks beneath. The latter requires daily changing of the straw.



MILKING COWS

Like all mammals, cows feed milk to their calves. A newborn dairy calf feeds from the cow for three days and then is fed by the farmer. After having a calf, the cow will continue to produce milk for about 10 months and so it must be milked. Cows are milked twice a day, in the morning and the evening. In the past, farmers milked cows by hand but today, milking is carried out by machines in a **milking parlour**.

Before milking, the cow's **udder** (teat) is thoroughly washed by the farmer and the milking machine is attached. After milking, the milk is kept **refrigerated** at 4.5°C until it is brought to the dairy by a milk tanker, where it is **pasteurised**. This means that it is heated and then cooled down to kill any bacteria that might cause disease.



CALVING

A heifer normally has her first calf at two years old. A cow is 'in-calf' (pregnant) for about 9.5 months and normally has one calf a year. Once the calf is born, the cow licks the calf all over to get to know it. A cow recognises her calf by its smell. A calf can walk and drink milk from the cow almost as soon as it is born. For these first days, it is very important that the calf feeds from its mother, as her milk contains important

antibodies that give the calf protection against disease. This milk is called colostrum. When a calf is born, its stomach is not fully developed and the calf cannot yet eat grass. The stomach gradually develops to allow the calf to eat grass and hay.



AMAZING FACTS ABOUT CATTLE

Cattle, like sheep and goats are **ruminants**. This means that they have a special type of stomach with four **pockets**, enabling them to get the most nutrients from their food. They swallow the grass without chewing, filling up the largest pocket in their stomach (rumen). The food is brought back up into the cow's mouth where it is chewed again. Cows generally spend up to 8 hours a day eating.

Cattle have no upper teeth. Like humans, calves get two sets of teeth, **milk teeth** (first set) and **permanent teeth** (second set). The calf has eight front teeth in its lower jaw when it is born. These gradually fall out and are replaced by the larger permanent teeth as the calf grows bigger. A farmer can tell the age of the animal by how many teeth it has.