Abstract - Bolton

Ethics versus economics: Early life killing of surplus dairy calves and the Wicked Problem it presents

Early life killing of surplus dairy calves (males and females not intended as future milking cows) is commonly identified as being out of step with community values and a threat to the dairy industry's social license to operate. However, implementing alternatives to early life killing that are both socially acceptable and economically viable is a complex challenge that fits many characteristics of a ‘Wicked Problem’. Addressing such complex challenges requires understanding and accounting for the needs of all stakeholders, including those that work in animal agriculture, the public, and the animals themselves. This discussion will describe some of the complex social and economic factors that contribute to how surplus calves are managed and highlight opportunities for working towards sustainable management of these animals in the future.

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