

An evaluation of the Scottish dairy industry by stakeholders provides a basis for future growth

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Scotland is the fifth largest milk-producing region in the UK, with 77% of its milking herd located in Southern Scotland (Scottish Dairy Cattle Association, 2019). Despite decreasing herd numbers, Scottish herd sizes have grown, with the number of dairy cows increasing to 180,293 in 2019 (Scottish Dairy Cattle Association, 2019). As part of Dairy-4-Future (D4F) - an EU Interreg project looking to increase the competitiveness, sustainability and resilience of dairying in the Atlantic Area region, which stretches along the Atlantic margin of Europe from Scotland to the Azores - Southern Scotland has been the focus of several case studies. D4F aims to identify, evaluate and widely propagate innovative dairying practices to the European dairy industry.

An evaluation of the dairy sector in each D4F member region was carried out, including a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of milk markets, enterprises and farming practices. The analysis looked at data from government, research and private bodies and involved individual interviews with key stakeholders and an interactive SWOT at two large, distinct agricultural events. SWOT results were ranked by participants to identify which points were most important to the Scottish dairying community. This work has resulted in a large and unique dataset with detailed feedback from Scottish stakeholders. In comparison with other countries in the project, Scotland had a positive outlook within its dairy industry and recognised the opportunities that “Scotland”, as a brand, provided. The SWOT results showed that many of the threats and weaknesses ranked highest in Scotland are issues which can be acted upon. The top four weaknesses identified were:

- 1. Supermarkets have too much power over the market*
- 2. Poor transport links*
- 3. Little encouragement for new entrants into the sector*
- 4. Poor signal and internet connectivity, which can impact upon isolation. Of the threats identified, some, such as the public's perception of dairying and its role in climate change, could be addressed through public engagement.*

This dataset provides a strong direction for an exploitation plan to improve the resilience and sustainability of dairying in Scotland. The issues identified by the Scottish dairying community are important and should shape future research and government policy.