

One of the 350 rearing farms working with Buitelaar is Elms farm located near the town of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire in central England. ILM was invited by Oliver King from Buitelaar and David Doherty from Buitelaar's Hide and Skin Division, Buitelaar International Trading to see one its British rosé veal suppliers at first-hand. The visit was to witness how the traceability programme works in practice and how they are able to provide the leather supply chain with a system that is able to trace each animal back to its birth if necessary.

What is rosé veal?

Rosé veal is an EU directive based term used to describe cattle that between the age of 8 to 12 months old at the point of slaughter. White veal is those slaughtered up to eight months old and any animals a day over twelve months old are simply known as beef cattle. Males are taken from dairy herds shortly after birth and placed into a collection centre, from there they are placed with a farmer and are fed in a series of pens, depending on age and size, up to the point of slaughter.

Clearly, Buitelaar's first priority with any animal reared in the food chain is for the quality of the meat. Using Elms farm as a typical example the male calves arrive at three weeks old and are milk fed using a powered milk formulation also provided by Buitelaar to the farmer. Following weaning they then move on to a corn fed diet which sees them grow and put on weight rapidly.

Prior to reaching the rearing farm each animal is issued with an identification ear tag on the farm where the calf is born, which includes a unique Buitelaar ID number for each calf and a secondary number denoting its mother's ID number. Each animal also has its own passport linked to its ID number where through a series of Buitelaar databases such as where it was born, parentage, vaccinations, weight and other information is stored and stays with the animal throughout its life.



■ Left: Oliver King, Sales Executive Buitelaar Group, David Doherty, Buitelaar International Trading, Tom and Robert Statham, Farmers at Elms farm

between 10 to 12 months once they have reached the required weight on the farm. Currently, most of skins are exported to Italy, France and some to Thailand for processing.

Rearing rosé veal

The bad old days of veal crates are long gone and today family farmers such as Tom Statham and his father Robert produce a high quality corn fed meat product with a high grade calfskin by-product of the meat industry at Elms farm.

"We make sure that all the animals are well looked after and each receives a series of inoculations on the farm to reduce the risk of illness", Tom Statham explained to ILM. "We clean the pens regularly and are constantly on the lookout for any animals that are unwell", he added.

Each animal passes through four development phases within the farm growing over 50kg a month on a corn based diet sourced from



■ Rosé veal calves arrive on the farm when they are three weeks old



■ Farmer Tom Statham feeds the calves a blend of corn feed



■ Older rosé veal calves

"Calves were seen as a low value product of the dairy industry", explains David Doherty, Hide & Skin Manager for Buitelaar. "Through our rosé veal programme we are now able to rear each animal in a humane way into the food chain and at the same time produce high quality calfskins for the tanning industry. The hide is something that is now managed in conjunction with animal welfare to produce best quality. Through the Buitelaar farm assured programme we are able to trace back the origin of each skin, which is useful for any tanner, brand or retailer as they are able to demonstrate that their leather comes from a specific farm where the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to."

Transparent supply chain

Buitelaar have access up to 40,000 head in the supply chain at any one time and work with meat processors, Woodhead Brothers, which are part of the UK based Morrisons supermarket group, to provide farm assured meat products. Through the rosé veal programme, they slaughter around up to 625 animals a week of which a lesser proportion are calves from the rosé scheme. Most are slaughtered

the arable fields surrounding the 200-acre farm. After twelve months each animal weighs between 440-465kg giving an average carcass weight around 265kg. From Elms farm they are taken on a two-hour drive for slaughter where the skins are either sold green or salted and shipped to customers through Buitelaar International - Hides and Skins Division. In the future Buitelaar would like to see the farmer financially incentivised for providing good quality hides for the tanning industry.

Traceability is the future

Although the rosé veal production by Buitelaar remains relatively modest in terms of volumes there is an opportunity to expand its traceability systems with sufficient interest from the leather supply chain. "We want to work with partners in the value chain that require the full traceability that we can offer. Many brands and retailers today are looking for full transparency of their products to ensure that good animal welfare and husbandry practices have taken place during each animal's life. We believe that our system offers this assurance to the leather supply chain", concludes David Doherty. ■