



CATTLE

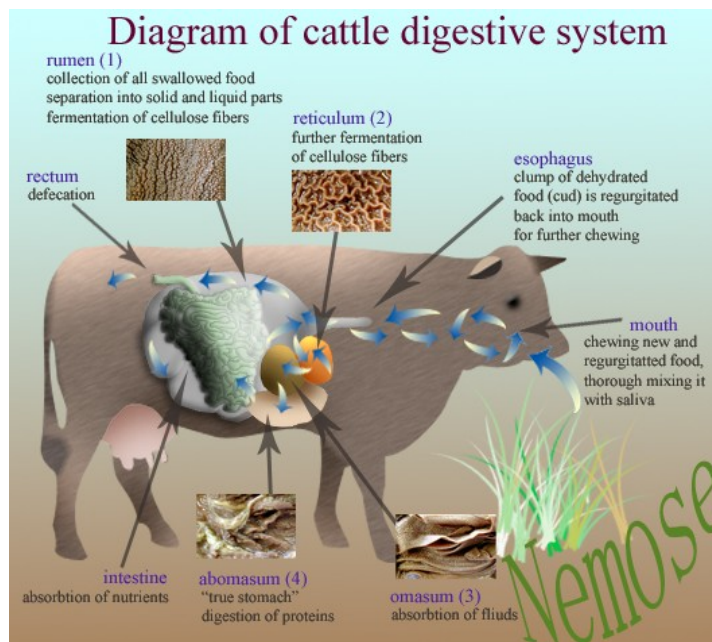
About Cattle

Cows are not indigenous to Europe; the related Aurochs used to be hunted by the original hunter gatherers. With the spread of agriculture came the spread of the modern cow family, which originated in Anatolia, more commonly now called Turkey. (To the right you can see the home of these farmers at sites like Çatalhöyük.)



Because Ireland is an island, the Aurochs never made it here. Instead, the Irish Elk was the most conspicuous herbivore until farming replaced the forests with pasture. Indigenous elk were gradually replaced by immigrant cows. In Ireland there are now many different breeds of cow: some bred for beef, some for their milk, and others are suitable for both.

Cattle are part of a family of animals that adapted to eating grass. They have an unusual digestive system that allows them to eat this fibrous plant, in which their digestion relies on fermentation. The digestive process also produces methane, which is a strong greenhouse gas.



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Organically managed cows are better for the environment than chemical cows. The production of chemical nitrogen fertiliser, which is extensively used in cow farming, uses large amounts of electricity in what is known as **The Haber Process**. In the factories where the nitrogen fertiliser is produced, they have their own pylon lines to supply the energy needed, which is more than some small towns have.

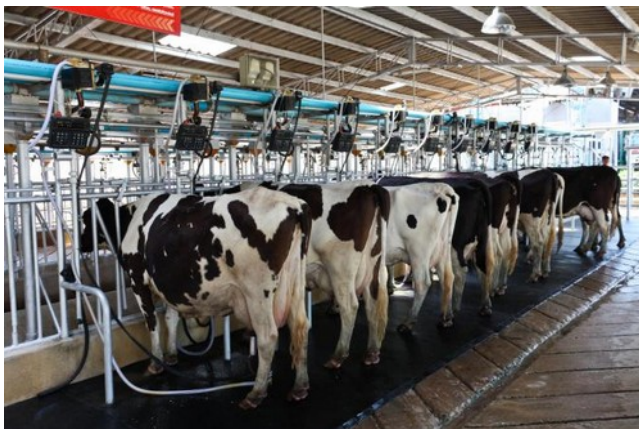
Most of the **Irish countryside is given over to cows**, one way or another. Cows in Ireland are fed mainly on grass, though maize and cow beet are also grown and you will see many fields of these, too. (It is rare to see a tillage man these days.) A lot of cattle are now kept indoors through the winter months, even if they are grass-fed, to save the fields from turning to mud. Climate change is meaning longer, wetter winters and more mud.

Dairy Herd

- Dairy cows are kept for their production of milk. This must be collected twice a day and this involves driving the cattle to milking sheds twice a day usually.
- Only cows (females) are required for milk production.
- One bull may be kept for herd survival. Younger bulls are sent for meat and leather production.
- The calves are taken away from their mothers very shortly after birth and kept separately so that the cows can go straight back into milk production.
- Calves are typically unwanted. In days gone by, they would simply have been shot. Now they are mostly sold to go to the veal industry or to be grown for beef.
- The average life of a dairy cow is to calve each year for five years, after which time she will be sent for slaughter.

In recent years the dairy industry in Ireland has expanded meaning that there are many thousands of calves each year.

There is a growing live export industry which involves long sea journeys to many countries where welfare is questionable at least. Many of the calves embark on such a journey when they are just weeks old, others are kept on the farm for a few months.



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Beef Herd

“Beef” is French a word brought into use in Ireland by the Normans. The Normans were an invading elite, from France, and as only the rich could afford meat regularly, the original French word for cow became the word for cooked cow, referred to as beef.

Beef gradually became incorporated into the Irish diet, and more people began raising cows for milk and meat production. Beef herds grew as a result.



Ecological Impact of Beef Production

Organic beef production in Ireland is based on grass-fed methods. This is much better for the environment than the very damaging feed that many systems use in many other areas.

However, for non-organic grass-fed cows, you will still see the tractors out, spreading little white pellets of chemically-fixed nitrogen.

*This is one of the main causes of **human-induced global warming**, as it uses a lot of energy in the production process.*

***Methane** is also a greenhouse gas that cows produce continually, and so contribute to warming in several ways.*

Farming based on grazing is not a very efficient use of land; it is not very productive. The same piece of land, used for potatoes, would feed many more people. The land could also be used for growing forests for fuel, other buildings, or fuel crops. When land is used inefficiently, at the same time as population is rising, the maths will eventually lead to a change of some kind.

People should start thinking about the advantages of rational land-based planning, especially if they think the planet is worth more than their phones or their hamburgers.

Cattle-Related Websites (Click for Links)

- ⇒ [Charlie's Organic Dairy Farm](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [A Day In The Life Of An Organic Farmer - From OMSCo](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [How We Farm Our Beef, Organic beef farm \(Somerset, UK\)](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [Calf at Foot Dairy](#) ⇐

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