

## Dairy UK Position Paper

### Hormones in Milk

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#### Background

Steroid hormones are widely distributed in the animal and vegetable products we consume. These steroid hormones can circulate in the plasma of animals and appear in milk by passing through a blood milk barrier.

There are three forms of oestrogen, all of which occur naturally in cows' milk. The three forms are oestrone, oestriol and oestradiol. The level of total oestrone correlate with the fat content. For this reason, Butter has the highest concentration, but the quantity of active oestrogens in dairy products is too low to demonstrate biological activity<sup>1</sup>.

Although permitted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the USA for commercial production of milk, the use of growth hormones (e.g. bovine somatotropin) is not permitted in the UK and the EU.

#### Dairy UK Position – for industry and stakeholders

It is often wrongly reported that milk and dairy foods contain added hormones and that animals are routinely given hormones to increase their milk yield.

In the UK, hormones are not added to milk, nor are they added to the diet of animals to enhance milk production. Natural hormones are however widely distributed in the animal and vegetable products we consume.

The use of growth hormones in dairy cattle has been banned in the EU since 1988. Additionally, from the mid-1990s onwards, the EU also banned the import of animals from the USA and Canada which had been treated with anabolic steroids.

Cows are not injected with hormones to keep them milking all year round. This myth stems from the use of bovine somatotropin (BST) in some countries which is used to stimulate higher milk yields, but it is not allowed in the EU. To produce milk, a cow needs to complete a pregnancy, the birth of a calf starts lactation. Normally cows will have a calf each year having had 6-8 weeks of no milk production known as "the dry period".

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<sup>1</sup> The Dairy Council, Hormones in Milk

Although cows may sometimes require veterinary treatment for health problems, such as hormones for reproductive issues or antibiotics for disease, all treatments are for an individual cow depending on her needs and are strictly controlled by vets.

### **Media statement**

The dairy industry goes above and beyond legal requirements to guarantee the highest standards of safety and hygiene for dairy products sold in the UK. Milk is tested regularly from farm to fridge through stringent control measures and any issue is dealt with swiftly and efficiently.

In the UK, hormones are not added to milk, nor are they added to the diet of animals to enhance milk production. This common misconception stems from the use of bovine somatotropin (BST) in some countries which is used to stimulate higher milk yields. However, the use of growth hormones in dairy cattle has been banned for almost 30 years in the EU.

The UK dairy industry remains committed to working towards the continuous improvement of the current testing regimes and the measures in place to guarantee the safety of dairy products.