

# Jane Eyres

## QUALITY SCOUT REPORT

### Visit to a farm in Merthyr Tydfil

#### Why I wanted to visit a McDonald's farm

“ I pretty much knew what to expect of a working farm before my visit. In my previous job, working for the Welsh Assembly Government, I had organised many seminars and meetings for farmers and had worked with many who had diversified into food production. My main question for the farmer was whether he was proud to be supplying McDonald's or if he was embarrassed to tell anyone for fear of the public thinking his herd was of inferior quality. What I found out surprised me.”

#### What the cattle eat

“ The farmer, first took me to the field where the heifers were kept. These are the female cows that were about to be calved. The heifers looked very content and had some wonderful grass to graze on and, whether they appreciated it or not, some wonderful scenery around the field where they were kept. The farmer explained that they were natural mowers (yes, mowers, not mooers) as the cattle in each of the fields around his 280 acre farm, ate grass as a staple part of their diet. The grass is supplemented with hay to slow down the digestion process and so help the cattle gain the most nutrients from the grass. The herd, mainly South Devonshires with some Aberdeen Angus, were among the prettiest cattle I've seen.”

#### What happens in the Winter

“ Other food is introduced into the animals' diet at key times of the year when they need a little more during the colder months. These cattle get additional bran, corn kernels, barley, oats and wheat germ – very healthy indeed! Sometimes vitamins are added to this, much like we do if we feel our diets need a little something extra to help us achieve our five-a-day! If the weather is particularly bad, the cattle are allowed indoors to cattle sheds for shelter. Luckily for us, the weather was holding out and though it was muddy underfoot from the previous day, the rain kept off.”

#### The killer question ... and some surprising answers

“ I decided it was best to get my killer question done and dusted as we started to descend to the next field. I asked the farmer if he was proud of supplying McDonald's or whether he kept it a secret for fear of people thinking his beef was inferior.

His answer surprised me. It was the abattoir that decides which beef supply coming in would go to which client based on the quality of the farm supplying it. All farms supplying

the abattoir have to have government Farm Assurance certificates. When the farmer was told by the abattoir where his beef was being sold, he was really pleased because he knew that McDonald's is using good quality meat, from British farms and good quality cuts of meat. No lips, eyes or ears, simply the forequarters of beef.

The next surprise was that the meat from the hindquarters of his cattle – the rump, fillet and sirloin steaks – is being supplied to a well-known supermarket for their premium range! So McDonald's farmers are deemed 'premium' and 'finest'!

I was thankful at this point that my answer had gone well and was very pleasantly surprised by the answer.

How old are the cattle when they're slaughtered?

The next stage of the tour was a trip across the farm to see the herd in the barn waiting to go to slaughter. This was the bit that I was dreading – seeing the condemned man, so to speak. The barn itself was warm and dry and the cattle inside looked very happy. The average age of cattle going from here to slaughter is 24 months. By law, they cannot be over 30 months and enter the food chain.

I soon snapped out of my remorse as my stomach started rumbling and I realised that lunch was approaching – a beef sandwich would go down very nicely at this point.

And that's really the point. If you eat meat, you have to realise where your meat comes from. It doesn't come ready packaged, clean and labelled. At some point, it has walked around a field and eaten grass and been pretty content with its companions."

## **My conclusions**

“ This visit emphasised the fact that British farmers have a passion for what they do. Like this farmer, many of them are third or fourth generation farmers. The animal husbandry and the attention to the welfare of his cattle was amazing.

So next time someone says that the meat in a McDonald's burger is rubbish and comes from God knows where overseas, correct them. Tell them that, in fact, it comes from British farms and from British farmers who care how their cattle are reared, what they are fed and how they are slaughtered. Which reminds me... my next stop is the abattoir to see if the care and attention on the farm is carried through the chain.”