

Argentina seeks beef production boost with bovine IUD

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Enrique Turin, a professor at the National University of Northwestern Buenos Aires, designed and is producing what he says is the world's first bovine intra-uterine device.

He has patented his invention locally and in the European Union.

The IUD is designed for cows that have already given birth to five to seven [calves](#), and are being fattened for slaughter.

Turin, 47, began experimenting with home-made bovine IUDs 20 years ago. Today he has a small factory built next to his home in Pergamino—245 kilometers (152 miles) north of Buenos Aires in Argentina's livestock and agricultural heartland—to produce the \$3.00 devices.

The cheap and simple items have been a success: some 2.5 million bovine IUDs have been exported to places like Brazil—a world beef-producing giant—and Spain.

Spanish officials have even approved one of Turin's models for use in sows, especially since the castration of boars was recently banned due to [animal welfare](#) concerns.

Cows need to reach the slaughterhouse with an empty uterus, but "that's not the case in Argentina," said Turin. "There's a high percentage of females that have finished their reproduction cycle and arrive at the slaughterhouse already pregnant."



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These pregnancies affect five percent of slaughtered cows, which in Argentina—one of the world's top beef producing countries—means about a one million animals a year.

The problem is more than ethical, because 10 kilos (22 pounds) of meat per animal can be lost because the nutrients fed to fatten the cow are instead consumed by the [fetus](#).

With the IUD "we estimate that five percent more of beef will be produced per animal," and considering the number of animals involved "it's a significant figure," said Turin.

The Argentine government has taken special interest in the invention, and this year agreed to finance the distribution of 440,000 bovine IUDs over two years to ranchers with small and mid-sized herds, said deputy Livestock Minister Alejandro Lotti.

Some 20,000 ranchers with up to 200 head of cattle will benefit from the program, Lotti told AFP.

There are currently 58 million head of cattle in Argentina, according to government figures. If widely used this IUD would revolutionize cattle husbandry on the pampas, where bulls and cows freely co-mingle.

Red meat is a staple of Argentine diet, but consumption has dropped 50 percent from 1958 to 2011.

Today average beef consumption per person is 53.4 kilos a year, down from 98.4 kilos, according to the Argentine Beef Promotion Institute, a public non-governmental institution.

Beef production has also dropped. Many ranchers sold off their herds in 2008 and 2009 in the midst of a drought and widespread complaints about government policy.

Some of those ranchers switched instead to products like soybeans, today Argentina's largest export.

Marcos Franco, an expert on animal obstetrics and behavior at the Universidad del Salvador, is impressed by what he has seen.

"I see this as something truly revolutionary," Franco told AFP. He views the device as a humane anti-pregnancy device that is "practically inoffensive".

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