

UK Hereford Society - Country Report 2020

By David Deakin, breed secretary

At the beginning of 2020 there was much excitement surrounding the imminent world Hereford conference held in the beautiful country of New Zealand. The United Kingdom would be well represented with a group of almost 30 delegates in attendance. The conference lived up to all expectations with an excellent mix of informative lectures, country reports and on farm visits.

Everything was well organised and kept to a strict timetable, made easier with a dedicated conference app, the first time such software had been used at a world Hereford conference. It enabled delegates to receive regular updates on itinerary changes, log contact details of the 400+ delegates and read relevant information on each scheduled activity.



An integral part of the UK delegation was the society sponsored UK Hereford Youth (UKHY) team of four, ably supported by UKHY coordinator Emma Smith. The team performed admirably and conducted themselves with a high degree of professionalism.



UK Hereford Youth team from L to R, James Ludgate, Matthew Rollason, Ryan Coates and Sophie Harvie

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Larry Feeney, long serving breed secretary of the Irish Hereford Cattle Society on being elected as the new world secretary general for the ensuing four years. Larry will bring his own inimitable style to the honoured position and replaced Uruguayan Jose 'Pepe' Bonica who held the position for the previous eight years. I would personally like to thank Pepe for his pragmatic and measured advice over many years.



UK Hereford president Mark Roberts (right) congratulates Larry Feeney on becoming the new secretary general of the World Hereford Council

The world Hereford conference was always going to be one of the highlights of the year but in a year decimated by the coronavirus its significance became more evident.



Conference delegates toured New Zealand and visited many excellent studs

As I write my report for the 2021 Hereford breed journal, we are in the midst of a global pandemic, the like of which has not been witnessed for approximately a hundred years. It is almost a year to the day since we first heard the word Covid-19, at that time it seemed as though it was someone else's concern over on the other side of the world. Little did we know the devastating effect it would have on people's health and everyday life.

However, the government is now rapidly rolling out a number of different vaccines to combat this deadly disease. So, I am optimistic for the future and hope that life will return to as close to normal during the coming months. Government restrictions imposed on us all during lockdown periods has enabled us to take stock of what we value most, our freedom to meet friends and family and move around the UK and further afield. It has certainly made us appreciate simple things that we had previously taken for granted. The overriding message, on reading the area association and club reports included in this journal, is that members have missed catching up with one another at summer shows and other events. It has made breeders appreciate that while it's important from a business perspective to do well with their show entries, the camaraderie among like-minded people is what has been missed the most by exhibitors and spectators.

I'm pleased to report that membership continues to grow, despite the lack of events over the past 12 months. Summer shows in particular, are very important in providing a shop window with which to promote our breed to farmers looking to commence a pedigree herd or to those wishing to purchase a new stock sire. It's equally pleasing to report that during the same period the Hereford Cattle Society recorded its highest number of pedigree registrations in over 30 years. The use of the Hereford sire in the commercial sector also remains strong, following record increases of Hereford sired calves in recent years.



UK members have desperately missed catching up a summer shows in 2020

The lack of events has enabled society staff to tackle a myriad of administrative tasks, which in a normal year time would not allow. We have modernised and updated many items including; the society's by-laws, membership packs, switched to a cloud based accountancy package, introduced a privacy notice and introduced a health and a safety policy with particular relevance to containing Covid-19.

The restrictions in the movement of people has resulted in council members meeting up remotely, with regular Zoom meetings becoming the norm. Although digital meetings can be challenging at times they have added a new dimension to council communication. While they will not replace the preferred face to face council meetings, they will be utilised for single subject meetings, assist in keeping business matters on track and help to make more timely decisions. Going forward the council will be meeting monthly over Zoom to keep abreast of the society's activities.

The society's council have initiated and supported some significant projects, most notably the introduction of a Hereford Beef PR marketing campaign. This has resulted in greater exposure of Hereford Beef to consumers through high-profile social media posts, press releases in distinguished publications and a more streamlined Hereford Beef website. During a twelve-month marketing campaign, we have seen a five-fold increase in Instagram followers and a four-fold increase in Facebook followers.

Council members have also introduced a new ruling to safeguard the integrity of the breed's ancestry database with the single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) testing of all first-time calvers, as from the 1 July 2020. This will result in all pedigree Hereford progeny being fully parentage verified in a relatively short space of time. The additional SNP testing will also speed up the implementation of another council initiative to commence with single-step genomically enhanced Estimated Breeding Values (GEBVs).

The success or otherwise of GEBVs will be based on robust phenotypical data recorded by members on-farm, so it is imperative that breeders embrace performance recording, a free service to society members.

One of the most exciting projects council presided over during the latter part of 2020 was to brand the society, a first in its long history, and one which will provide the society with a modern, bold and commercially focused appearance. The easy option for the sub-committee involved, was to play it safe when it came to selecting a breed logo and design concept. This would undoubtedly have pleased the masses, but by being different, the Hereford Cattle Society is making a statement and standing out from a crowded marketplace. We have been pleased with feedback received on the branding exercise from members in the UK and overseas, meat processors and our competitors.

The national lockdowns have certainly impacted on consumer eating habits. During the first one, processors experienced a carcase imbalance issue, as consumers purchased huge quantities of mince. However, since those early days in March and April, shoppers have since begun to purchase a wide range of products, which has seen demand surge and beef prices reflect this increase in popularity.

AHDB's rallying cry, 'Stay home and celebrate #steaknight' and other similar campaigns have assisted in keeping beef in vogue, as more people are using their disposable income to cook good quality, nutritious, traceable, delicious British beef. I'm confident that after the pandemic has subsided, the general public will continue to cook at home with quality branded beef such as Hereford and use their new-found skills developed during lockdown.

With a Brexit deal now concluded, we can look forward to 2021, with the Hereford Cattle Society well placed to address most, if not all, the major issues facing the beef industry. We have a breed that thrives on a grass and forage-based diets, one that will meet the expectations of

environmentally conscious processors, retailers and consumers. Over the next few years, council members will adopt a two-pronged approach, continue with Hereford Beef marketing, while simultaneously conducting an evidence-based project to highlight the breed's ability to produce beef sustainably.