

UK sees largest representation at European Conference

The 15th European Hereford Conference commenced in Hungary's capital Budapest, and was superbly organised by Dr Istvan Marton and Professor Dr Ferenc Szabo.

With 15 UK delegates from approximately 120 attendees, the UK had the largest representation of any participating country. The first day was spent visiting the historic sights of Budapest, a city divided in two by the mighty Danube River, with Buda on one side and Pest on the other. Today, two million people live in Budapest, a fifth of the total population of Hungary.

City tour of Budapest

As a country, Hungary has had a traumatic history, having been on the wrong side of two World Wars and subsequently losing two thirds of their land following defeat in World War 1. The vast majority of Hungarians remained on the land they called 'home', hence many people living in surrounding countries still speak Hungarian to this day. After defeat in the second World War, Hungary became a socialist state, causing many of their aristocracy to flee the country to take up residency in western Europe. The vast majority of these ex-pats have now returned since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and Hungary's acceptance into the European Union.

Mezofalvai Farm visit

The first visit took place at a former state-owned farm, which is now privately run and managed by a company called Mezofalvai. They own some 200 pedigree Hereford females of various ages, which delegates viewed in one mob with calves at foot and running with four DNA profiled stock bulls. All resulting progeny will go for beef production, sourced by local top restaurants. In general, the cattle looked well, although lean by UK standards and with good locomotion. One stock bull being used by Mezofalvai was sired by Free Town Baron, bred by RA Bradstock and partners. All sires remain outside all year round.

Farm facts:

- 2,630 hectares (6,500 acres) of crops including; cereals, rapeseed, beans, sugar beet
- Export beans and seeds all over the world
- 900 dairy cows averaging 11,000 litres of milk



200 breeding cows with calves at foot at Mezofalvai

- Forestry with diverse game; wild boar, pheasants and red deer
- Herefords first introduced into Hungary in 1973 and onto the farm in 1974
- Herefords are crossed with the local breed, the Hungarian Grey
- Two farms; one 200ha (494ac) with a herd of 200 Hereford cows and one 1,200ha (2,965ac) with a larger herd of 800 head, with some pure-bred Herefords and some Hereford cross Charolais and Limousins
- The farm also undertakes a few local shows each year and have been quite successful in the showring

Following an informative visit, UK Hereford president Jonathan Moorhouse presented Mezofalvai CEO Andras Hirjak with a small gift on behalf of the UK Hereford Society.



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The following day commenced with a drive around Lake Balaton, the largest in middle Europe, and a visit to Tihany Benedictine Abbey, before moving onto a deer farm at Kaposmérő. The farm was home to 1,300 deer, mainly reds but there were also some fallow. It was exceptionally well-run, open to public and used by students from Kaposvar University for research purposes. Hospitality, throughout our stay in Hungary, as with most Hereford conferences, was second to none and as part of the visit delegates tucked into a plate of dry aged venison strips and donkey salami. The farm also ran commercial herds of Hungarian Greys, donkeys, Hungarian draft horses and water buffalo.

Conference day

There were 15 different countries in attendance with most giving a country report, including Russia, New Zealand and Kazakhstan.

David Deakin also presented on behalf of the UK Hereford Cattle Society.

The main points from country presentations included:

Hungary

- 6,000 Herefords
- Exported 300 bulls to Turkey during the past 12 months
- Herefords were the first breed to be imported into Hungary
- Sixth most popular breed and fourth most popular cross breed in the country
- Lecture by Professor Dr Ferenc Szabo entitled 'The situation and results of Hereford breeding in Hungary'

Russia

- Herefords first came into Russia from the UK in 1930
- Hereford Association formed in 2009

Sweden

- Hereford second largest beef breed in Sweden after Charolais
- 320 members
- 90 pedigree Hereford herds
- Two main shows per year with 30 and 10 head respectively per show
- Bull testing station used to source and promote top Hereford genetics
- Best Swedish-bred bulls selected by Nordic company, Viking genetics, with an average price paid of €5,300 and a top of €11,300

Denmark

- 14 different beef breeds in the country
- 5,500 Herefords (third largest beef breed in Denmark)
- A brand of Danish Hereford beef has been developed over the past two years, as a gastronomic trend moves towards marbled beef with taste. The demand for Danish Hereford beef, which has to be 75 per cent Hereford, has increased the price paid for Herefords. Danes are starting to tell the story of farming Hereford cattle to further increase demand from hotels and restaurants
- Commenced a Hereford Youth programme with members up to the age of 30 years

Estonia

- 16,943 Herefords - the most popular beef breed in the country
- Started importing Herefords in 1978
- Hereford Breeders' Association commenced in 1994
- 86,400 dairy cattle
- Herefords outside all year round
- Imported a lot of Herefords from Denmark (27 per cent)
- First Herefords imported from Hungary
- Exported 3,000 fattening bulls to Turkey and Poland in the past 12 months

Ireland

- 26 per cent increase in registrations over the past four years
- 54 per cent increase in Hereford sired cattle (157,000 to 243,000) during the last four years
- 16,699 pedigree Herefords and 3,511 non-pedigree Herefords genomically tested.

Kazakhstan

- 17 million people
- Ninth biggest country in the world
- 30,801 Herefords now in Kazakhstan
- 1930 Herefords imported from UK and Uruguay
- Since 2016, bulls are split into two groups; category one pure-bred and category two beef

New Zealand

- NZ Association moved from microsatellite to SNP testing in October 2017
- Youth competition at the World Hereford Conference 2020
- Pre-conference tour in North Island for five days
- Post-conference tour in the South Island for five days

Norway

- Hereford is second largest beef breed in the country. Out of 69,000 beef cows, 10,000 are Hereford
- 80 bulls placed on a testing station each year
- Best bulls are selected for breeding and AI, which are then considered as 'elite'

Uruguay

- Numbers of Herefords are stable
- The Black Baldie (Hereford cross Angus) is fast increasing in numbers as a cross-bred animal.
- At the 2018 Prado Show, Montevideo more Herefords were sold than Angus and for a higher price
- 60kg beef consumed per head per annum

Hedrehelyre Farm visit

On arrival participants viewed a large bunch of good functional cattle, with an even mixture of both horned and poll genetics. Delegates were a group of over 100 people, so to be able to walk among cows with calves at foot, while they remained calm is great testament to the breed.

Delegates later saw a group of 30 14 month old heifers, which had all been AI'd and pre-sold for €2,000 each to a Hereford breeder in the north of the country. They were an exceptional group of heifers, very even and possibly the best cattle the group saw in Hungary.

Sárospatak Farm visit

The final visit involved a very long drive to the north of Hungary from Kaposvar. Here, delegates saw a large herd of some 800 head of Herefords all running together and held in the corner of a field by five men on-foot! They were a mixture of cows and young heifers all with calves at foot, running with several stock bulls. Cattle looked lean due to a very hot dry summer, resulting in poor quality grazing but they were another even group in their working clothes, well-marked and very functional.

In the second part of the visit Sárospatak stock bulls were seen along with other bulls that had been placed on a central testing station. Each year 25 to 45 registered Hereford bulls are selected by picking the top 5 per cent from performance recorded figures from across the country. All the data from these bulls was being monitored by Dr Istvan Marton and his research team.

The farm at Sárospatak also had a couple of Wagyu sires which they crossed with a Hereford to produce top quality beef to order from specific high-end restaurants.

As a nation, Hungary is developing and growing more confident. Some of the delegates who were at the last European Hereford Conference held in Hungary in 1995, described how they could see significant improvements in the standard of living and farming methods. In terms of agriculture, Hungary will be a force to be reckoned with in the near future, with vast farms, wonderful topography, excellent stone free soils and a superb climate.

At the conference delegates voted for France to host the 16th European Hereford Conference in 2022.