



# UK Country Report

*By David Deakin, Breed Secretary*

After many years of stability the Society has gone through a period of transition over the past 12 months with yours truly taking over as breed secretary in May and Laura Bowyer commencing as marketing manager towards the end of 2018. The Society's council have also seen some significant changes, with Robin Irvine, Co Armagh, taking over as chairman following the departure of Richard Mann after six years and five new council members taking office in 2018 for the ensuing three years.



*David Deakin*

We are now just two months away from leaving the EU and still much is to be agreed between the British Government and the 27 EU member states, which leaves a great deal of uncertainty especially around future trade deals. Farmers across the UK are left wondering what future government support will be provided and in what format?

Although there are still many questions unanswered, we do know that whatever deal is thrashed out by both sides, some important principles will remain. We will still need to offer food to the consumer, and especially beef which is superb in quality, produced sustainably, is safe to eat, affordable and produced to excellent welfare standards. The millennials, who will be increasingly important consumers in the future, are concerned about the food we eat and demand evidence that our beef is produced with integrity and is fully traceable. In the UK, we produce world class beef to the highest standards throughout the supply chain.

We should be proud of this fact and engage with consumers through social media, open days and promotional literature and shout about all that is good within British agriculture.

With increasing pressure from the general public, as to what impact livestock farming has on the environment, using pastures unsuitable for arable farming for future beef production will become ever more important. Native breeds utilising these permanent pastures with their low cost base, sequestering soil carbon and building soil health and resilience will become an integral part of farming. The Hereford will be perfectly placed for this shift in emphasis.

These pasture-based beef production systems will provide beef to multiple retailers with a unique selling point which discerning consumers will request and appreciate.

There has never been a better time to champion farming systems that produce high quality food, protect our most vital environmental resources, contribute to rural society and are economically viable, or a breed

better placed than the Hereford to deliver this vision.

In July, the Hereford Cattle Society moved from microsatellite DNA testing to SNP (single nucleotide polymorphism) testing. Although this has required a substantial investment by the Society, it is believed this modern and robust testing programme will result in a number of breeder benefits.

These will include sire discovery (without the requirement of the dam), future genomic evaluations (early decisions on replacements/animals for sale), breed composition (market quality assurance) and traceability (improving food integrity).



The Hereford beef website continues to evolve with new beef businesses and exciting recipes being regularly added. Hereford beef has grown in popularity among consumers and purveyors alike, with the throughput of branded Hereford beef carcasses more than trebling in the past 10 years. It was pleasing to see the British Government had confidence to offer Hereford beef fillet as the main course on a quintessentially British menu when Prime Minister Theresa May hosted US President Donald Trump at Blenheim Palace during his inaugural visit to the UK.

The NBA held a beef event in Northern Ireland for the first time in many years. At the event, the Northern Ireland Hereford Breeders' Association did the Society and breed proud by taking the runner-up spot in the best beef breed stand. This was followed up in May with a successful NBA Beef Expo event, held at Shrewsbury Market. The Society once again collected the trophy for best beef breed stand - our fifth win during the past eight years. Our thanks go to the Hereford Cattle Breeders' Association for sourcing the cattle that helped make the display stand out from the rest.

The year ended with more success when the South West Hereford Association was presented with a silver award for best breed stand at Agrifest South West.

Records have certainly soared over the past year with the highest price ever recorded at a public auction for a poll bull at the third annual Designer Genes sale held at Shrewsbury Auction Mart at £13,650.



*Coley 1 Pilot Smashed the UK record  
for a poll Hereford bull*

In total, 16 heifer lots were sold to average £5,873, topping three times at £8,400 which made it the highest averaging Hereford sale in UK history. On the evening prior to the live sale, an inaugural DGS Goes Global event was held and yet more records were broken. This time 125 straws of semen sold to average £92 per straw, with a top of £460, while 44 embryos sold to average £570 per embryo and topped at £2,000.

Success also came at the two Society sales held at Hereford Livestock Market, with a record average of £4,321 for bulls at the spring sale and a female centre record of £7,900 at the autumn sale. We have undertaken a detailed analysis of bull sale prices over the past six Society shows and sales (2016 to 2018) and can draw several important conclusions.

The most significant price differential of £776 per head has been recorded where bulls with a terminal sire index (TSI) above breed average are compared to those breed average or below. Bulls in the top 10 per cent for TSI provided a further increase, at an average of £1,032 per head over those breed average or

below. Surely this is the evidence breeders require to further convince them that Breedplan performance recording is an important management tool.



The UK Hereford Youth (UKHY) movement continues to grow at a pace under the co-ordination of Emma Smith.

A new UK Hereford Youth working group has been set up to provide Emma with the support she needs to further grow events and fulfil her increasing remit.

During 2019, an extended number of events will be held, culminating in the selection of a team of four youngsters to compete at the 2020 World Hereford

Conference in New Zealand. The fruits of Emma's labour are certainly coming to the fore with interbreed successes for UKHY members at last year's Royal Welsh and Royal Three Counties shows. For more details on UKHY please turn to P139-141.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Society's staff for working through some difficult changes over the past 12 months - their hard work and dedication is much appreciated. I also look forward to working with council over the next two years to develop ideas and opportunities for the Hereford breed in a new post-Brexit era and to meet as many members as possible at summer shows, events or at the open day held on the 11 June at David and Maggie Kelly's farm in Cumbria.