

## Finnish Hereford Association – Country Report 2020

The year 2020 was shadowed by covid-19 in Finland as in the rest of the world. Because of strict regulations put in place in March by the Finnish government, the pandemic hasn't reached such high and destructive numbers here as in many other countries. The pandemic has still left a mark in Finnish society, agriculture included. Most of the main events of the year, like agricultural shows and cattle auctions, were cancelled or moved online. Not only was this a loss in possible marketing and sales, but a missed opportunity to take a break from the often lonely work and meet other farmers and cattle owners. At the moment, when vaccinations have begun in Finland, we are optimistic about holding a Hereford show in July 2021 as a part of the bi-annual agricultural show Okra. Still, new covid-19 variants might change the scene quite suddenly, but we will keep our fingers crossed and do our best to stop the pandemic from spreading.

Even with a worldwide pandemic shaking societies all around, the agricultural industry is still most affected by what it always is: weather. In Finland, cattle graze usually from May to October and winter silage is harvested two or three times per season. The summer of 2020 was warmer than usual, and in some parts of the country there were heavy rains while others suffered from drought. For cattle farmers, this meant varying conditions for harvesting and grazing. Positively, in many farms the grazing season lasted longer than usual, and farmers have been able to secure enough silage for winter.

As the cattle shows were cancelled, Finnish breeders decided to find last year's best animals by taking part in the Champion of the World online show. Of all the participants, the Finnish Champion Luoteen Pandora was also the second best female in Europe. Luoteen Pandora is owned by Marja and Vesa Luomajärvi. Male champion 2020 of Finland was Löytmurto Ambassador, from the owner Samu Ovaska. One of the four judges of the global competition was a long-time hereford breeding family from Finland, Hannele and Juha Moisander (Anttila Polled Hereford).



FINLAND



LUOTEEN PANDORA



FINLAND



LOYTMURTO  
AMBASSADOR



For the hereford breed in particular, 2020 was a quiet one in the sense of activities because there were hardly any events. Still, in addition to the usual farm work there is progress in many fronts. Climate change is a topic that is both globally and in Finland linked to the food industry. A lot of criticism and questions are raised about both land and water use and greenhouse gas emissions of agriculture and beef production in particular. A positive turn is that the discussion in Finland is getting broader and the importance of grazing for biodiversity, which is also under threat, is brought up more frequently. In Finland, the natural habitats along with plant and insect species most threatened by extinction are the ones situated in old farm land, and have developed over centuries in areas where there has been grazing. When grazing has decreased, these specific habitats and species accustomed to them are becoming rare. The importance of grazing is uplifting the status of all cattle farmers – even though not all farms have grazing cattle – and especially herefords, being excellent grazers, have a strong case in this debate.

An ongoing research on beef genotypes is run by the Finnish Nature Resource Centre Luke, partnered with Finnish food industry and cattle breeding organizations and the Nordic Cattle Genetic Evaluation organization NAV. The genotypes of dairy cattle have already been successfully mapped, and the current study aims to expand to beef breeds and includes all five major beef cattle breeds in Finland: hereford, angus, charolais, simmental and limousin. Beef cattle is gaining popularity over dairy cattle in Finland, and the population has been rising steadily over the last years. All in all, there were about 62.000 suckler cows in Finland in 2020, and hereford is the most popular breed. Even though there is more cattle, the trend is that farms are getting fewer but bigger: the number of beef production farms have gone from over 3000 in 2015 to 2800 in 2019.

Even though hereford has always been a popular choice for its health and durability, there are unfortunately some genetic diseases we have to be wary of as breeders. Two quite recently found genetic diseases of hereford, MSUD and MD, came up in discussions in Finland in 2020. The way of organizing testing for these diseases is still a bit unclear, but the Finnish Hereford Association is working with local breeding organizations to get testing available for cattle breeders as soon as possible.

A new study on the viability of Finnish beef cattle farms, a Master's thesis done by Titta Jämsä from Atria (one of the largest food industry companies in Finland), was published. Jämsä studied the major beef breeds with statistics like first calving age of heifers, days between calving, calving percentage and calf mortality, and the average number of calves per cow over lifetime. She found that even though there are some differences between breeds, the most significant variance was found between individual farms. This means that management is a far more important factor in the viability of a farm than choosing a specific breed. The fact that Finnish farms are usually quite small might fade out the role of the breed. This having been said, hereford did quite well in the study overall and did not stand out in any negative way, but rather stood firm and steady in the middle ground as we all know it does.

The Finnish Hereford Association wishes all fellow hereford breeders in Ireland good health for farmers and cattle alike for 2021!