GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND ADDRESS TO THE 2018 WORLD CONGRESS – Australia

The weather and Brexit are the main topic of conversation in the UK farming community – the weather is causing all sorts of problems. The 2017/2018 winter/spring is certainly one to forget, although 2017 is likely to be the fifth warmest in the UK since 1910, many people will probably remember the year for some of its more notable weather events. Events like ex-hurricane Ophelia, which in October brought high winds and disruption to parts of Ireland and the UK, and memorably for some drew up dust from the Sahara and smoke from the wildfires in Iberia, giving us the appearance of sunset at midday. There has almost been seven months of heavy rain/snow and sub-zero temperatures triggered by multiple "Beasts from the East". Our usual weather pattern comes from the west, but this winter very cold winds and snow has come from the East, which has resulted in many losses of sheep, delay in all spring work and increased feeding costs. After the wet 2017 summer, dismal autumn and wet, cold winter - an early spring would have been appreciated, but it was not to be and all farmers in all parts of the UK are battling against the elements, causing more work and expense.

The other topic on the lips of farmers in the UK - is Brexit, the last time we met, we had just voted to leave EEC and we all wondered if by the next congress things would be sorted out for the exit date of 2019. I am sorry to say that we are not much further on, the Government has suffered defeat after defeat with their plans and it reported that there could be up to 20 different Brexit deals between the UK and the EU that could take years to be approved, so heaven knows how many congresses could have passed before we can say we have deals settled with our EU neighbours.

In the UK Galloway world, we have exciting times ahead, as we have been secured funding for a Farm/Quality Assurance Scheme, sales and marketing campaign and learning journeys. As a resulted we are able to send three young people - Ian Carlisle, Callum Park and Fraser Cameron to the congress, I am sure you will make them very welcome, please say a hello to them. The Farm Assurance Scheme is a first for Galloways and we hope it will translate into more sales of live animals and more people eating our quality product. Taking about sales, our sales are very much an important part of our work, although numbers are down, clearance at sales are still near 100%. Galloways are still wanted and hopefully more in demand with the Farm /Quality Assurance Scheme given confidence to our product.

Left to Right - Ian Carlisle, Callum Park, Fergus Ewing (Member of Scottish Parliament) and Fraser Cameron at the launch of our Quality Assurance Scheme at the Royal Highland Show.

Our new logo for our Quality Assurance Scheme.

Galloway registrations numbers are in par with other years, approximately 900 female registrations and 50 male registrations. Although new members joining the Society are down on recent years, there are just less beef cattle in the country.

At our last AGM, Scott McKinnon, who many of you met at Gretna, stood down as Chairman and John Finlay from the noted Blackcraig Galloways took on the role as Chairman. John along with his wife Ann are known to many of you and the Blackcraig herd name is in many, many pedigree certificates. We are deeply in debt to Scott, as he not only steered the Society to find funding for the farm/quality assurance scheme but the Congress committee to such a successful congress, which I hope many of you have found memories. On behalf of all the organising committee and all our UK Members, we would like to wish you a very successful and enjoyable 2018 congress.

New Chairman John, (leading the calf) with help from his son Iain and daughter Kelly at the Royal Highland Show in June.

We are sorry to report of the death in December of past Secretary Mr Alex MacDonald, Alex was with the Society for 13 years and until ill health he still helped out at shows and sales. He very much enjoyed his time with the Society, during Alex's time as Secretary he witnessed BSE, Foot and Mouth Disease and government meddling also the buoyant trade by the great demand for Galloways from Germany.

As I write this, beef prices are at a spring 5 year high at 363.21p/kg. The measure currently stands 14p above year earlier levels. Industry reports suggest that prices are being supported by processors being able to achieve good carcase balance due to a varied customer base. As you can imagine, this price is all needed, due to the extra demands of the bad weather. Lamb prices are also buoyant and further prediction are this will be the case all year again due to the high number of losses of ewes and lambs due to the bad weather.

With so many uncertainties in British agricultural, I am sure our breeders being hardy, much like their cattle will weather the storms and keep on producing this very special, quality product.

We would be delighted to welcome and help plan your trip to Great Britain and wishing you a very successful and enjoyable congress.