THE BELTED GALLOWAY CATTLE SOCIETY

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World Galloway Conference 2014

Belted Galloway Cattle Society report

Backgound

The Society continues to register Belted Galloways and White Galloways throughout the U.K. and Ireland. Belted Galloways are experiencing a rise in popularity due to their hardiness, meat quality and suitability for government environmental grazing schemes. However, White Galloways are not so much in demand, and numbers remain fairly low.

The Society

In line with the current interest in Belted Galloways in the U.K. and Ireland the Society is in good heart and membership continues to expand every year. We currently have 617 members, up from 572 in 2013.

A system of birth notification was introduced in 2011, and in the year to July 2014 a total of 926 births were notified to the Society (this includes White Galloways). This is helping to build up a picture of how many animals are in the national herd and the breeding pattern of our cows.

During the same period a total of 881 Belted females were fully registered and 71 bulls. White Galloway registrations included 46 females and 1 bull. Of these around 20 % are registered online using the Society's software which members are able to access.

The Society organises three main sales each year and attends the major shows in England and Scotland. There is a keen interest in some parts of Britain and particularly in Ireland, where local members participate in minor shows thereby doing a useful job of promoting the breeds.

The breeds

Belted Galloways:

The current popularity of the Beltie can be attributed to three main causes:

1) The breed is legendary for its hardiness, its ability to turn poor quality pasture into excellent quality beef and the easiness with which the cattle can be kept. They very rarely have problems with calving and their slow maturing growth means they are extremely cheap to keep.
2) Government agricultural policy in Britain and Ireland continues to become more and more "green", and one of the mainstay policies encourages graziers in the uplands to utilise traditional native breeds to maintain grassland in environmentally sensitive areas. The Beltie is perfectly suited to this type of regime, and many new breeders are keeping Belties in order to maximise the benefits of these environmental grazing schemes.
3) The striking appearance of the breed, coupled with the advantages of easy care and low input production, make the Beltie an obvious choice for the burgeoning number of "Lifestyle Farmers" who are increasingly evident in the countryside. The breed has benefitted from a large number of these newcomers to farming, and the Society often provides assistance and advice to them while they establish their new herds.

As the keeper of pedigree records and the issuer of pedigree certificates the Society remains the guardian of the integrity of the breeds, and policy on breed standards continues to be the subject of lively debate. At one of end of the spectrum some breeders feel that commercial carcase quality outweighs the importance of colours and markings, while at the opposite end other breeders maintain that the markings of a Belted Galloway are what defines it and are therefore sacrosanct.

The Society continues to insist that, in order to be fully pedigreed, an animal must be perfectly marked, i.e. a belt which is unbroken and has no coloured spots, and the absence of white hair on any other part of the body. As a compromise it will register mis-marked females in an appendix herd book, such as those with a little white on the foot (but not the tail). If subsequent generations prove to be properly marked they can grade up to full registration over three generations.

White Galloways:

These are numerically much fewer than Belties, and only 30 breeders currently register White Galloways with the Society. Although the breed boasts similar qualities to the Beltie in terms of carcase conformation, size and profitability, it seems to suffer from a lower level of interest. This translates into lower market prices which in turn leads to fewer breeders choosing the White Galloway. It remains a challenge for the Society to reverse this trend, and more effort will be put into promoting the White Galloway and its attributes.

There is no doubt that interest in the White Galloway remains strong in other parts of the world, and breeders in Britain and Ireland were extremely interested to read of the research taking place in Germany into the hereditability of traits within the White Galloway breed.

The future

Marketing

The Society continues to enjoy the benefits of a high level of interest in the breeds, however it is important not to take anything for granted, and one of the challenges for the future is to create demand, not only for breeding stock, but also for beef from the Belted and White Galloway. So far this has proved tricky to do, not because of any doubt over the tremendous eating qualities of the beef they produce, but because of the nature of the herds in our countries. The great majority of herds in Britain and Ireland are very small – mostly into single figures – which makes it very difficult to co-ordinate supplies of carcasses for any major beef promotions. This is something which the Society continues to look at with a view to stimulating demand for our beef and thereby safeguarding the future of our breeds.

Herd Health

The drive to control, and hopefully eradicate, certain cattle diseases continues to be a major challenge in Britain and Ireland. Bovine Tuberculosis is on the increase in Britain, and one of the worst affected areas is the south west of England, which also happens to contain the second largest concentration of Belted Galloways after the breed's native home in south west Scotland. Many of our members have been affected by this disease and government policy seems to be less than effective at dealing with it.

In common with other breeds the Society is keen to encourage members to adopt high health status schemes covering diseases such as Bovine Viral Diahorrea, Infectious Bovine Rhinitis and Leptospirosis. Some breeds have a compulsory policy regarding health status which obliges breeders to comply with certain herd health standards. The Belted Galloway Society has so far not adopted any such policies, but recognises the need for the Society to provide leadership to its members and to encourage the obvious advantages of high herd health status. Accordingly it has decided that beginning in 2015 cattle offered for sale at Society-run sales will have to comply with minimum standards for Bovine Viral Diahorrea.

2016!

Finally, arrangements are underway for the next World Galloway Conference to be held in Scotland in 2016, and, along with our colleagues in the Galloway Cattle Society, we are all very excited about the prospect of hosting this important event and are looking forward to welcoming our friends from around the world.