

# The **ABERDEEN-ANGUS** Cattle Society



Pedigree House  
6 King's Place  
Perth  
Scotland  
PH2 8AD

☎ 01738 622 477  
☎ 01738 636 436  
✉ info@aberdeen-angus.co.uk  
🌐 www.aberdeen-angus.com

# Newsletter

The **ABERDEEN-ANGUS** Cattle Society Newsletter January 2010



## NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2010

The New Year has come and gone as we edge into 2010. The past year has been difficult with recession and unemployment becoming a reality for many. The agricultural sector remains relatively stable with beef and lamb prices continuing firm for what has been a one of the longest periods in recent times. The result has seen confidence rise with many arable farmers questioning the wisdom of growing grain at prices at or below the cost of production. Livestock, which has always been looked on as the poor relation of the arable sector can now hold its own and provide a positive platform for future investment. The signs are good. However optimism has to be tempered with caution. For the first time in almost a decade we are seeing a significant increase in the number of beef heifers retained for breeding which should in time, arrest the long term decline in cow numbers. The Aberdeen-Angus breed and its associated brand are well placed to capitalise on a rising market either by adding value to existing businesses or laying the foundations for new enterprises. We have the tools in the box and the capacity to move forward. There's good news to be had so let's get started.

The following are some of the topics discussed by Council when they last met. As always the subject matter is in no particular order but we welcome your comments and feedback.

**WEBSITE:** Since its initial launch in the early part of 09, the Society's new website has been an unqualified success. It is the only 'news driven' website of any breed society and has quickly established itself as a 'favourite' with regular web users. The statistics speak for themselves with almost 13,000 users in November which is an increase of 36% and the number of page views at almost 45,000 which is again up by over 32%. Google have moved our website rating up to 5/10 which may sound average but that puts us alongside such household names as Waitrose, JCB, Dixons and Schweppes which is not bad for a breed society.

The next stage of development will see video footage of major events posted, links to pedigree breeders herds via Google Maps®, and a User Gallery where members can post their herd and event photographs. What do you think and what would you like to see? You can leave your suggestions on the website or e-mail Chrissie Lawrence direct on [chrissie@mooandbaa.com](mailto:chrissie@mooandbaa.com)

It is important that we receive your feedback so please take a few minutes to let us know how we are doing.

**BCMS STATISTICS:** The most recent statistics from BCMS, as analysed by EBLEX covering the year to July 2009 make for some encouraging reading if you are an Aberdeen-Angus breeder. Set against a contracting beef herd with total calf numbers down by 7%, the Aberdeen-Angus breed was the only breed not to suffer a decline in passport application numbers. In real terms our market share has increased.

BREED	YEAR TO JULY 08	% OF TOTAL	YEAR TO JULY 09	% OF TOTAL	CHANGE	% CHANGE
LIMOUSIN	626529	24%	569689	22%	-56840	-9%
CHAROLAIS	297193	11%	267154	10%	-30039	-10%
ABERDEEN ANGUS	229524	9%	229818	9%	+294	( - )%
SIMMENTAL	201676	8%	182528	7%	-19148	-9%
BRITISH BLUE	187425	7%	154598	6%	-32827	-18%
HEREFORD	94487	4%	93976	4%	-511	-1%

It is clear that as beef enterprises strive to improve their efficiency and deliver positive margins, the more progressive and cost conscious beef farmers are moving over to Aberdeen-Angus. We have more work to do but evidence would suggest that we are moving in the right direction.

**OFFICIAL SALES:** The 2010 sale season which is fast approaching sees Council's decision to raise the health standard of cattle offered for sale kicking into action. First sales to be affected will be those conducted through UA's new market at Stirling and those at H&H's Borderway sale centre. Other sales will follow suit in 2011.

In summary, all cattle entered for these sales will require to come from BVD accredited herds and be vaccinated and if not from BVD accredited herds then the individual animals will require to be tested and vaccinated against BVD. Similarly on the Johnes front, cattle entered must come from herds which are testing for Johnes and taking steps to eradicate the disease. This is a bold initiative by Council and we are proud to be the first breed society to raise the standard at our official sales. This initiative will go a long way to increasing buyer confidence. Beef farmers have enough to worry about without having to contend with buying pedigree cattle of unknown health status at an official Society sale. Council are to be commended in raising the bar in regard to this very important issue. As our membership grows and new breeders are coming forward to official sales, it is important that we try to make life as easy as possible. To this end the following check list has been posted on our website:

**OFFICIAL SOCIETY SALES CHECK LIST:** All members entering cattle for any official Society sale should ensure that the following simple steps are taken so reducing any problems. Remember all cattle will be inspected by a Society appointed vet prior to the sale whose decision on any related matter is final.

- **Closing Dates for Entries:** Check with the Auctioneers or on the Society's website for the closing dates for entries. As a general rule closing dates are usually about 4 to 6 weeks before the sale date but can vary depending on the auctioneer's rules.
- **Tagging:** Ensure animals are double tagged in accordance with current EU legislation.
- **Other Documents Required:** Check that the date of birth on your entry form is the same on both their Pedigree Certificate and their BCMS Passport or equivalent document in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.
- **Contagious Diseases:** Check that all animals are free from Warts (particular attention should be paid to the sheath and scrotal area of bulls), Ringworm, Mange, Lice or other contagious diseases.
- **Treatments:** If your entries are showing signs of any of the above conditions and have been treated then a signed veterinary certificate to that effect must accompany your entry.
- **Health Declaration Forms:** All cattle entered for official society sales must be accompanied by a completed Health Declaration Card copies of which are available from the auctioneers or can be downloaded from the Society's website.
- **BVD:** If your entries *are from a BVD accredited herd* then they must be vaccinated with a veterinary approved vaccine no more than 12 months prior to the date of the sale.
- **BVD:** If your entries *are from a herd which is not BVD accredited* then the individual animals which you have

entered must be tested free of BVD and vaccinated no more than three months prior to the date of the sale.

- **Johnes Disease:** All entries for official Society sales must come from herds which have entered into a CHCS Approved Health Scheme and should be monitoring the levels of Johnes Disease within their herd and taking steps to reduce its incidence if present.
- **Testicle Size:** All bulls entered for official sales will have their testicles examined by a vet. The minimum circumference at the widest part of the scrotum should be 30cms at 12 months of age, 32cms at 18 months of age and 34cms at 24 months of age. The testicles should be even sized and of a firm consistency.
- **Presentation:** It is in all vendors' interests that your animals are presented in the best possible condition and should be washed and clipped where ever possible. If you can't do this and would like some help then call the office and we will put you in touch with someone who can help.

**DNA & GENOMICS:** Genomics is term whereby an animal's genetic performance may be predicted from its DNA profile. In simple terms it is fast tracking of performance recording as we know it. DNA technology is undoubtedly one of the fastest moving fields in modern science. The latest advances supposedly allow DNA samples to predict an animal's genetic merit for such traits as feed efficiency, marbling and tenderness with other traits relating to growth and performance currently under development.

A commercial test for these and other traits is currently offered by both Pfizer and Merial and a number of breeders are using the tests. The Society has entered into an agreement with both companies to test over 100 high accuracy AI bulls to see how the resulting 'genomic data' compares with the EBV information currently available through the BreedPlan performance recording programme. The results are expected in the early part of this year so it will be interesting to see how the two match up. Only then will the Society be in a position to evaluate the importance of this work in respect of future genetic selection criteria.

Standard DNA profiling of stock sires and parentage checking is currently carried out by Pfizer and it would be fair to say that there have been a number of initial problems with data transfer and turnaround times. The Society is pleased to announce that Pfizer have entered into a long term contract with Orchid Cellmark Ltd, a UK based forensic and DNA laboratory who will be carrying out the necessary testing from 2010. This will greatly increase the turnaround time and with a dedicated customer help line we will be able to get the answers our members need and deserve. We look forward to developing the DNA and Genomics business with your help and participation.

DNA profiling is a very important part of ensuring the integrity of the Society's Herd Book. The commercial importance of this work cannot be over emphasised. DNA is the holy grail of brand protection and the Aberdeen-Angus brand is the foundation on which our success is built. We are indebted to all those breeders who have been voluntarily sending in DNA profiles of bulls as they are sold off the farm. This, combined with the Society policy of compulsory testing of stock sires as well as all bulls forward at official sales is helping to compile a very extensive

DNA database of working Aberdeen-Angus bulls. We are currently in discussion with retailers and wholesalers as to how best to use this database to help protect our Aberdeen-Angus brand. Council are committed to extending this important work and encourage breeders to collect a DNA sample at the point of sale of all bulls that leave the farm for breeding. DNA kits for all your 2009 born bulls will be supplied in the early part of 2010. The Society is grateful for all the help and assistance given by breeders to date. Our brand is your future.

**RECESSIVE GENETIC DISORDERS:** Much has been written in various overseas Angus Journals about the recent identification of certain recessive genes that cause abnormalities in new born Aberdeen-Angus calves. Curly Calf Syndrome is the principal defect currently being tested for with Fawn Calf Syndrome a close second, but no reliable DNA test is currently available for the latter condition. Curly Calf Syndrome has had a major impact on some overseas herd books to the extent that bulls that are tested free of the condition are actively sought after whilst carriers are largely unsalable.

The Society has installed a copy of GeneProb® software which identifies the % suspicion of animals being carriers by their pedigree. Initial tests would indicate that Curly Calf Syndrome will not have a major impact on our Herd Book. All members who have cattle in their herds which are identified as probable carriers of the condition will be notified and will be required to carry out the necessary DNA tests to determine the animal's actual status. Council have decided that from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 no such proven carriers will be able to be registered and if already in the Herd Book then their progeny will require to be tested before their registration is allowed. As and when a definitive test for Fawn Calf Syndrome is available then the same conditions will be introduced.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2010:** Under the very capable stewardship of Gayle Bersey, the Society's Youth Development Programme continues to lead by example. So much so that we have had a number of enquiries from other breed societies who are considering sending some of their youngsters on to the Aberdeen-Angus programme.

The 2009 finals which were held at the Beef Expo Event at Borderway Mart Carlisle were a great success with 23 finalists battling it out for the big prizes. Congratulations to Jess Denning (Senior), Charles McCombie (Intermediate) and Hannah Slown (Junior) but also a very big thank you to all those instructors, helpers and participants who made the regional training days and the final such a success.

Gayle has some major new initiatives planned for 2010 to make the programme more attractive to new participants as well providing fresh challenges for those who reapply. It is planned for the 2010 finals to be held over a weekend with extended training and showmanship classes as well as some social entertainment to provide a more competitive and socially interactive experience for all. The Society is actively looking for sponsorship for this new event.

We have included the new youth Development Brochure and an entry form for the 2010 programme along with this Newsletter so if you know someone who you think would enjoy the experience then please get them to fill in the form and we will look after the rest.

When the Society launched this ambitious programme we relied very much on members' donations of heifers, semen or embryos which were offered for sale and which raised a significant sum of money. In the interim the programme has grown considerably and Council would encourage any member who is considering donating a heifer, semen or embryos to get in touch with the office so we can advise on how best to make this happen.

A successful Youth Development Programme is very important to the Society as it demonstrates our educational function to the Charities Regulators who are increasingly interested in a breed society's charitable status. Your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

**ABERDEEN-ANGUS FAMILY NAMES:** The Aberdeen-Angus Society is one of the few remaining breed societies that require all calves to be named according to the family of their dam. Whilst a very important and endearing principal to some, others find it totally confusing.

We will soon be publishing a revised list of Family Names which will reduce the number of options and hopefully simplify the process. Contrary to some rumours that have been circulating, the Society is not changing the naming process and family names will be part of our heritage for many years to come. It is hoped that a revised list will be circulated to all members in the early part of 2010.

**TWO YEAR OLD HEIFERS WITH CALVES AT FOOT:** The Aberdeen-Angus breed is almost unique in that it is more than capable of calving down at 2 years of age and many commercial beef farmers are starting to recognise the tangible economic benefits of doing just that. However we need to do more in order to get the doubters converted. To have a suckled calf or store to sell before some other breeds are even in calf can add very considerably to the bottom line of any enterprise. Council are keen to promote this attribute to the wider farming audience and will be encouraging breeders to bring out such heifers to regional and national shows. Discussions are underway with show secretaries and sponsors to make classes for these cattle an attractive proposition from 2011 onwards.

**CALF SHOWS 2010:** The series of winter based calf shows have now become part of the Aberdeen-Angus calendar and have been very successful in their own right. Council policy has been to support, both physically and financially those calf shows where our cattle are exposed to a much wider commercial beef farmer audience such as at the Scottish Winter Fair at Ingliston and Borderway Beef Expo event in Carlisle.

In light of falling entries and attendance, Council have decided to withdraw their support for the Scottish Winter Fair's National Aberdeen-Angus Calf Show and to concentrate on making the Borderway event even bigger. It really was an exceptional event in 2009 and we have aspirations to make it the premier winter show for Aberdeen-Angus cattle in the UK. It will be rebranded as the "The Angus Winter National" so you better start planning now. It will be the one to win in 2010.

Council are very appreciative of all the help and promotion gained from the Black Beauty Bonanza, South of England Calf Show (Bristol), Skipton Calf Show, Dungannon and Mountrath Calf Shows.

**BYE-LAW CHANGES:** Council are required to review and maintain the Society's Bye-Laws to ensure they reflect the needs of a progressive and modern breed society. Included in the next issue of the Review and also available on our website is the latest amended version of our Bye-Laws. These contain important changes in relation to Cloning, Recessive Genetic Disorders, DNA requirements for Late Registrations and Health Criteria for Entry at Official Sales. Bye-laws by their very nature are not easy reading and tend to be used only when there is a problem. However it is important that all members are aware of their existence and any changes therein.

**LLOYDS BANKING GROUP ANNUAL COMPETITION:** Some good news from the banking sector. The Society is pleased to announce that Lloyds Banking Group have agreed to sponsor our annual herds competition (formerly the Bank of Scotland Competition) which will be run over the spring and early summer of 2010. Please watch the web site and farming press for full details which will be announced shortly.

**WALKERS TROPHY 2010:** Walkers Shortbread have generously agreed to their continued sponsorship of the 2010 Walkers Show Herd of the year competition. Congratulations to Tom Rennie's Mosston Muir Herd who won the 2009 competition with Bryan Ronan's Jerusalem Herd in second spot and JF & S Heath's Ravenfield Herd in third place.

The 2010 shows which have been nominated for the Walker Trophy are as follows:

Royal Highland, Gt. Yorkshire, Royal Welsh, Border Union, Black Isle, Echt, Westmorland, Newbury, East of England and Royal Cornwall shows. Good luck to all competitors.

**USING A NEW BULL THIS YEAR?:** This is a rather repetitive but very, very important issue. I'm not sure how often this has appeared in our Newsletter but it still requires to be reemphasised. We have had one unfortunate member who bought a bull and did not get it DNA'd and by the time the first calves were being registered, some of the cows were back in calf to the same bull. To cut a long story short we were unable to find the sire of the bull in question and the unfortunate owner now has two generations of offspring that cannot be registered. Don't let this happen to you.

So please remember if you have bought, begged, borrowed or stolen a new bull for use this year then please get him DNA'd before you use him. Mistakes are better sorted before your new bull serves any of your cows rather than waiting till there are calves on the ground. *"New Bull then Order a DNA Kit!"*

#### **YEAR LETTER:**

The 2010 YEAR LETTER is "K".

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### **COUNCIL – February 2009**

**John Coultrip (Past President)** Wingfield Farm, Stalisfield, Faversham, Kent ME13 0BS  
(t) 01795 890278 (f) 01795 890224  
(m) 07711 276454 (e) johncoultrip@btinternet.com

**Albert De Cogan (Junior Vice President)**  
Killamuckey, Castlemartyr, Co. Cork, Republic of Ireland  
(t) 00 353 (0)21 4667266 (m) 00353 (0)86 1520962

**John R Elliot**, 2 Roxburgh Mains Cottages, Kelso TD5 8NJ  
(t) 01573 450729 (m) 07795 165140 (e) johnrelliot@aol.com

**Karl Hancock**, Whitebottom Farm, Etherow Park, Compstall, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 5JQ  
(t) 01614 278273 (m) 07968 323069

**Paul R Jeenes (Senior Vice President)**,  
Grandon Manor Farm, Grandon Manor, Friggie Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 5LH  
(t) 01373 464127 (f) 01373 461814 (m) 07769 903113  
(e) paul\_jeenes@yahoo.co.uk

**Joseph Keville**, Federo, Aughamore, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, Republic of Ireland.  
(t) 00 353 (71) 9631178

**William McLaren Jnr. (President)**  
Netherton, Blackford, Auchterarder, Perthshire PH4 1QU  
(t/f) 01764 682288 (m) 07740 786112 (e) mclaren672@aol.com

**Mark Pilcher**  
Gear Farm, Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall TR26 3DD  
(t/f) 01736 795471 (e) gearpilch@aol.com

**James Playfair-Hannay**, Morebattle Tofts, Morebattle, Kelso, Roxburghshire TD5 8AD  
(t) 01573 440364 (f) 01573 440643 (m) 07831 455994  
(e) james.playfair@btconnect.com

**Ms Angela Robertson**, Nightingale Farm, Bishampton, Pershore, Worcs. WR10 2NH  
(t) 01386 462001 (m) 07887 556167 (e) angrobo@hotmail.com

**Bryan Ronan**, Jerusalem Farm, Colby, Appleby, Cumbria CA16 6BB  
(t) 01768 352948 (m) 07979 592990 (e) b.s.ronan@btinternet.com

**Henry C. Rowntree**, Windy Pike, Gisburn, Clitheroe, Lancs. BB7 4HZ  
(t) 01200 445320 (e) rowntree@ribbleaberdeen-angus.co.uk

**Hamish W Sclater**, Denhead Farms, Dunlugas, Turriff, Aberdeenshire AB53 4NR  
(t) 01261 821236 (e) h2@deveronaa.fsnet.co.uk

**Michael C Spooner**, Honeysuckle Cottage, Kingwood, Henley, Oxon RG9 5NT  
(t/f) 01491 628637 (e) kingwoodangus@aol.com

**Robert J. Steenson (President IAAA)**, Cavanbellaghy House, 20 Dernasigh Road, Killylead, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland BT60 4PA  
(t/f) 028 375 48675 (m) 07799 867755  
(e) rjs.cavanbellaghy@btopenworld.com

**John Tait**, Rostellan, Middleton, Co. Cork, Republic of Ireland  
(t/f) 00 353 (21) 4652680 (e) johnwallacetait@gmail.com

**J Russell Taylor**, Moncur, Inchtute, Perthshire PH14 9QF  
(t) 01828 686215 (f) 01828 686400 (m) 07768 257528  
(e) russell@taypack.com

**Ian Watson**, Abbey View, Kelso, Roxburghshire TD5 8HX  
(t) 01573 225111 (f) 01896 848006  
(e) ian@borderfarmsupplies.co.uk

**Neil A Wattie**, The Farmhouse, Mains of Tonley, Alford, Aberdeenshire AB33 8EL  
(t) 01975 562021 (m) 07803 186748 (e) neil.wattie@sellar.co.uk

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**The Date of the next Council Meeting is scheduled for Sunday 31st January, 2010.**