



5<sup>th</sup> of April 2020

Dear Red Breed Enthusiasts,

I was reminded in the last few weeks by posts on facebook that a year has elapsed since we enjoyed each other's company during the 2019 IRDBF Conference tour in Australia. The preparation work for the event was large, but the enjoyment and fond memories are even larger.

The trip ended with the determination to increase international cooperation through greater information and resource sharing, prompted by some stirring presentations during the formal sessions and many private discussions. Since the tour, the IRDBF has welcomed three new member breeds: American Milking Shorthorn Society, New Zealand Milking Shorthorn Society and the Illawarra Cattle Society of Australia. We trust that membership will provide these groups access to new networks and information that cannot be gained elsewhere. The challenge for the IRDBF organisation is that these three groups are from outside Europe and interaction with other members does not occur as easily there as it does in the close proximity of the "Old World". For the benefit of all members, the IRDBF must become more intentional and regular in its communications.

Most breeders receive plenty of regular communication from various genetics companies promoting their product and services, along with technical herd management information. What is missing, is personal networking among Red breeders sharing experiences and lessons learnt. Youth exchanges, farmer tours, student farm placements, as well as emails, social media, telephone conversations, video conferences and holiday visits are all essential parts of the networking habits we must adopt. The IRDBF is your organisation and its success depends on the efforts of every member breed and every member of those breeds to communicate and share. The IRDBF should provide regular communication about movements and trends which could affect the prosperity of Red breeds, but it should also foster increased personal relationships which complete the network.

Michele and I had planned to travel to Europe for the northern hemisphere summer, but alas world events have caused that to be deferred. We had intended to meet Danish breeders in July at Herning show and visit the herds of many who visited Australia in 2019. We had also hoped to meet other identities who may have attended from neighbouring countries, but we must wait for the world to normalise before contemplating that joy. I do hope to be able to enjoy the camaraderie when we all meet for our scheduled conference in Estonia, during the second week of July 2022. I am certain our Estonian hosts will provide an exceptional event.

I have a question for you to ponder: Are Red breeders applying enough selection pressure to their females? Male selection pressure has increased manifold since the advent of artificial insemination, but the same selection intensity is not being practiced among Red females. In other breeds, routine use of embryo transfer has increased female selection pressure, especially in North America where some commercial herds are taking embryos from their top 20% ranked females and implanting them in lower ranked females to breed better herd replacements.

I am expecting many of you will hold the opinion that this practice narrows the gene pool and increases inbreeding, but does it? Are the pedigrees of the bottom 80% vastly different from the top 20%? I suspect not. Are the top 20 cows simply the outliers we should be breeding from? Large cost savings could be generated if the intergenerational consistency of Reds could be improved. Are the costs of embryo work markedly different between North America and the rest of the world? I know that the logistics of embryo work are much more difficult in grazing systems than in housed systems. Are there better ways to increase female selection pressure and the rate of breed improvement? I would like to know your comments on this topic, as it has many perspectives and deserves constructive debate.

Australians are also enduring social contact restrictions at present, with police allowing only essential travel. Everyone is advised to stay at home through media and public peer pressure. So we are all looking forward to the celebrations when the restrictions are gradually lifted. BUT, I suspect the world may be a different place after this and what happens when the next virus threat pops up? All I know at the moment is that farm life is continuing mostly as it was before, but with the added complication of slow deliveries on some farm inputs.

I hope this email is thought provoking and I welcome your feedback. Would you like to receive these emails regularly- two or three times per year perhaps? Let me know your preference? Are there specific topics you would like raised? Is email the best format for this communication? I cannot promise to circulate all the comments I receive as I hope there will be too many, but I will summarise the opinions received.

Best regards and good health,

Graeme Hamilton.