

Letters to the editor

FOCUS ON: The dairy industry

Semen imports will benefit us all

● From Robert Perchard, senior vice-president, RJA & HS.

I FEEL I must add much-needed balance to the semen importation argument following a number of recent articles in your paper reporting views opposed to the importation of genetic material (Jersey bull semen).

Although the arguments of people such as Laurence Le Ruez and Nicholas Myburgh are superficially persuasive, they dwell too much on the glories of the past and ignore the huge strides that have been made in the development of the Jersey breed worldwide - advances which the present day Island cow cannot match.

In fact, as Dr Bichard's report 'Sustainable Development of the Island's Dairy Cattle' clearly highlights, the Island Jersey trails all others in the developed world in genetic advancement and performance to the point that the gain in a single generation using imported semen could surpass the progress made in all the years of the Bull Proving Scheme.

The reality is that the Island is no longer seen by the world as the provider of superior breeding stock, and only a small (but vocal and much quoted) minority return to purchase animals or semen. Though many visitors are very complimentary about the Island's cattle, as was the case with the herd's competition judge, Graham Wallace, recently, the inescapable fact is that they, in common with the vast majority of mainland and overseas Jersey breeders, have turned their backs on Island bloodlines in their own breeding programmes!

Why is productivity so important? The plain answer to this is that the fiercely competitive global market in which milk and dairy products are traded across the world means that price pressure is biting hard at the viability of dairy production everywhere. While it will always be more expensive to produce milk in Jersey, for many reasons, we cannot ignore the need to improve our productivity, both on our farms and in our cattle, just as our competitors are doing, if we are to survive.

All stakeholders stand to benefit from importation - our dairy farmers, the milk-buying public and, of course, the taxpayer, for we should not forget that our unique situation comes with a sizeable price tag in the form of extra subsidy. It is a brave, or misguided, person who will argue against this necessary step in these days of poor returns to dairy producers.

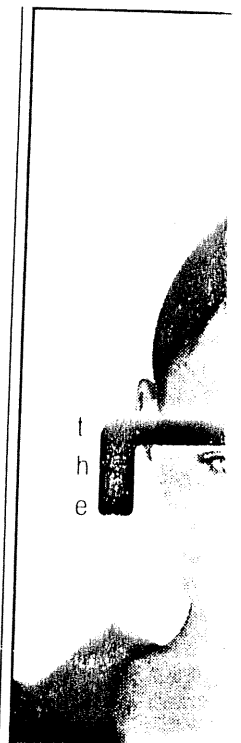


Robert Perchard

with today's requirements, is a testament to the high level of skill and commitment still present among our Island's dairy fraternity. This commitment has been sorely tested, however, over a number of years resulting in a high level of frustration being felt by a great many breeders.

It cannot be overlooked that those who work hardest to safeguard the interests of the breed in the Island, by taking positions of responsibility on the council of the society etc, are widely supportive of Dr Bichard's conclusions that importation of semen is the right step for the Island breed to take at this time. Naturally, it goes without saying that fullest safeguards must be taken with regard to the health status and genetic purity of any imported breeding material.

The unique nature of the Island's herd and



NEW ME
We would like
the team, who
for new and

NEW SA
We are cur
business by
floor which
by November

NEW POS
Due to our
requiring a s
in December.

Interested can
Madeline or B
in strictest con

THANK Y
We would like
for their supp
two years and
the years ahead

views opposed to the importation of genetic material (Jersey bull semen).

Although the arguments of people such as Laurence Le Ruez and Nicholas Myburgh are superficially persuasive, they dwell too much on the glories of the past and ignore the huge strides that have been made in the development of the Jersey breed worldwide - advances which the present day Island cow cannot match.

In fact, as Dr Richard's report 'Sustainable Development of the Island's Dairy Cattle' clearly highlights, the Island Jersey trails all others in the developed world in genetic advancement and performance to the point that the gain in a single generation using imported semen could surpass the progress made in all the years of the Bull Proving Scheme.

The reality is that the Island is no longer seen by the world as the provider of superior breeding stock, and only a small (but vocal and much quoted) minority return to purchase animals or semen. Though many visitors are very complimentary about the Island's cattle, as was the case with the herd's competition judge, Graham Wallace, recently, the inescapable fact is that they, in common with the vast majority of mainland and overseas Jersey breeders, have turned their backs on Island bloodlines in their own breeding programmes!

Why is productivity so important? The plain answer to this is that the fiercely competitive global market in which milk and dairy products are traded across the world means that price pressure is biting hard at the viability of dairy production everywhere. While it will always be more expensive to produce milk in Jersey, for many reasons, we cannot ignore the need to improve our productivity, both on our farms and in our cattle, just as our competitors are doing, if we are to survive.

All stakeholders stand to benefit from importation - our dairy farmers, the milk-buying public and, of course, the taxpayer, for we should not forget that our unique situation comes with a sizeable price tag in the form of extra subsidy. It is a brave, or misguided, person who will argue against this necessary step in these days of poor returns to dairy producers, necessary savings in States expenditure and a possible erosion in consumer support.

The case for action, now, to help safeguard the future viability of the Island cow is strong - and can be made persuasively, without fear or favour, to any faceless European bureaucrat who may care to scrutinise the activities of our industry.

Some, like Mr Myburgh, may question the desire for higher production and greater efficiency in the Jersey context, asserting that 'milk quality would decline and cows would suffer symptoms such as declining fertility and udder health'. Doom-laden predictions such as these presuppose that our breeders are so naïve as to blindly chase production and figures at all costs. To state that this would be the inevitable outcome is to do a disservice to both these breeders and the scientists who provide the statistical tools so vital for breed improvement in the modern world.

Rather, what I envisage in a post-importation scenario would be a process of careful evaluation by breeders of the various available 'proven' sires (judged by the performance of their daughters, with milk production being only one of the criteria, alongside equally important traits such as body conformation and udder health). This would need to be followed by prudent mating decisions calculated to complement the strengths and correct the weaknesses of the individual animal being mated; in effect using the identical processes, albeit with the use of modern techniques, as those employed by our forebears.

Truly impressive results are being achieved by able breeders around the world using these methods. I have seen the evidence with my own eyes on study visits to North America, Denmark, the UK and beyond, and not simply by listening to the 'so-called genetic scientists' and 'academics' that Mr Myburgh is so disparaging of.

Can it be that the Island breeders of today are simply reckless or have fallen so far behind the standards of the breeders of yesteryear? On the contrary! The reason that the Island herd retains its integrity at all, in the face of decades of exportation of its best animals, and has in recent years selected a more modern cow in keeping



Robert Perchard

with today's requirements, is a testament to the high level of skill and commitment still present among our Island's dairy fraternity. This commitment has been sorely tested, however, over a number of years resulting in a high level of frustration being felt by a great many breeders.

It cannot be overlooked that those who work hardest to safeguard the interests of the breed in the Island, by taking positions of responsibility on the council of the society etc, are widely supportive of Dr Richard's conclusions that importation of semen is the right step for the Island breed to take at this time. Naturally, it goes without saying that fullest safeguards must be taken with regard to the health status and genetic purity of any imported breeding material.

The unique nature of the Island's herd and gene pool has been widely commented on and I would like to address a few remarks on this subject. True, the fact that no importations have taken place for 240 years is remarkable and a matter of real academic interest. Just as remarkable is the fact that the herd has not degenerated despite the continued export of valuable genetic material. How sustainable this situation is in the light of the expected narrowing of bloodlines and genetic variability within the Island in the future is arguable.

Dr Richard's remedy, should importation be thrown out, is for all animals to be mated randomly according to some as yet unspecified genetic master plan; such a radical departure, it is said, could avoid inbreeding and keep the breed viable. What would the critics have to say about this, I wonder, given our great tradition of cattle breeding? There is too much sentimentality surrounding our Island breed for, in truth, there is only one Jersey breed of cattle worldwide. To look at it in another way, one could say that the Island has lent to the world the genetic material which represents its breed of cattle, to be looked after and developed. An importation from overseas pure pedigree Jersey bloodlines would be, accordingly, only calling back some of the Island's own genetic material which has been perpetuated beyond its shores. Likewise, a decision to put off importation now will only rebound on us later, by which time the integrity of the Island herd may have suffered.

Now is the time for Jersey's breeders to grasp a historic opportunity, by building on our illustrious past and using the best available tools to put the Island cow back in the forefront of world cattle breeding. By the sensible use of international genetics, focusing on breeding high-quality cattle rather than falling into the trap of merely chasing higher milk production, we can improve the profitability of local milk production and, furthermore, not do this at the expense of type (ie conformation) as is happening at the moment.

A further benefit would be a revival in the flagging export market, with the demand for high genetic merit Jerseys being a huge growth area. We should be there!

Le Paysage, Route des Côtes du Nord St Martin

NEW ME

We would like
the team, who
for new and

NEW SA

We are cur
business by
floor which
by November

NEW POS

Due to our
requiring a s
in December

Interested call
Madeline or

in strictest

THANK Y

We would like
for their sup
two years and
the years ahe



