

## **The Ayrshire Breed**



### **Ayrshire History (By Jack Lawson)**

The Ayrshire breed of dairy cattle had their origin in the west of Scotland many hundreds of years ago but Ayrshire have now spread to almost every continent and country of the world playing an important role in global dairy production and nutrition. The expansion to many of the European countries was deliberate with well thought out importations but to others it could be described as accidental.

The attractions of the breed were many as there was high in protein, the butterfat was claimed to be more easily digestible than some other dairy breeds, were disease resistant, had great longevity, good fertility and had a good conversion of feed to milk. The ‘accidental’ exportations were in the early days of sailing ships when journeys to North America, Africa and the far East could last for months and with no electricity or fridges yet invented one of the ways to provide fresh food and vitamins was to take Ayrshire cows on board to provide fresh milk on a daily basis. When the ships reached their destinations the cows were no longer required and were left in Canada, USA, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, South America and even Antarctica.

The worth of Ayrshire was quickly recognized on all continents and regular exports took place in the 1800s by faster ships and in the later 1950s onwards in cargo planes but with advent of frozen semen and embryos, moving round the world is comparatively simple operation. The first official Ayrshire Cattle Breed Society was registered in USA in 1870 dedicated to record keeping and promotion and that was seven years before the UK Breed Society was formed in 1877. Since that time Ayrshire Society or Associations have been formed in most countries and in 1974 the World Federation of Ayrshire Breed Associations was formed of which Kenya has been a leading member since its inception and hosted one of its best World Conferences in 1984.

Breeders of Ayrshire cattle have always been at the forefront of progress being one of the first to practice official milk recording in 1901 and quickly adopt the more modern aids of artificial insemination, embryo transfer and the use of genetic information. The result has been a doubling of individual cow production in the last thirty years.

## **Major keepers of Ayrshire breed in the world (Jack Lawson)**



### ***Ayrshire Herd from ADC Ol' Ngantongo***

Countries with some of the largest populations of Ayrshire include Finland, Russia, Canada and Sweden but Kenya is one of the jewels in the Ayrshire crown with a very large population of the breed. The reason why Kenya and the Ayrshire are important to each other is that the Ayrshire is ideal for the natural conditions of the country. It thrives at high altitudes, is resistant to ultra violet rays provided the predominately brown colour is present, has good fertility and longevity under these conditions, does well on a variety of diets and most importantly produces great quantities of quality milk which is important to a growing population and dairy industry.

Not only is the Ayrshire important to Kenya for food supply we believe it gives Kenya the potential of being the Ayrshire stud farm of Africa. Over the last thirty years through the foresight the late Hon. Reuben Chesire, ADC, and CAIS have all made a large investment in the importation of Ayrshire and semen from the UK but very importantly specifically selected for Kenya conditions. CAIS have a unique stud of bulls mostly bred out of leading cows that have proven themselves under Kenya conditions and the bulls themselves have bred exceptional offspring. Kenya is a near neighbour to many other developing countries who are keen copy Kenya's success and they will be looking towards Kenya for top class breeding cattle to improve their dairy cattle industry, therefore it is up to Kenya Ayrshire Breeders to maintain the improvement standards, capture the potential market and the whole continent will benefit.

I recall visiting Kenya two years ago and seeing many super Ayrshire but my lasting memory is seeing a great cow near Kitale who was her mother's thirteenth calf and in turn she was expecting her thirteenth calf that is unique for any country. I look forward to visiting my beloved Kenya again in June and seeing the famous Livestock Breeders

Show and sale. I wish all farmers and others connected in any way to the Ayrshire breed in Kenya every success in the future you have the potential the breed has the potential make it work and will flourish.

### **The Ayrshire breed in Kenya (Cleopas Okore)**

The Ayrshire breed has been in the country for over one hundred years having been introduced to Kenya in 1908 from South Africa. There has been a continuous development of the breed over the years through introduction of bloodlines from several countries around the world including United Kingdoms, South Africa, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada and USA and more recently from Finland. The Ayrshire cattle breeders' society of Kenya (ACBSK) was founded in 1920 and since then has been promoting the breeding of a medium sized cow with a balance between type and production, long life in the herd with good fertility. Due to the hardiness of the breed the Ayrshire is preferred by the small scale farmers who keep both the pure breed and crosses.



There are an estimated 1.3 million grade Ayrshire in the country of which around 30,000 are registered by the Kenya Stud Book. Most of these registered animals are found with the major Ayrshire cattle breeders in the country including Kisima, Chemusian, ADC (Ol' Ngantongo, ADC Katuke, Ngongongereri, Marimba, Makongi farms among others. This shows that there is still a lot of work to be done by the society to increase the number of registered animals. The society has continued to create awareness amongst the Ayrshire breeders on the importance of Recording and registration through ASK shows and Field days.

The breed is spread in all ecological zones in the country from the Kenya highlands to the semi arid areas and coastal region. This spread is due to the breed's ability to adapt to various ecological zones and also disease tolerance.

The national average production of Ayrshire in Kenya is 3000kgs of milk in 305 days at 4.7% butterfat and 4.5 % protein.

The highest officially milk recorded Ayrshire milk producer in the country gave 9852kgs in 305 days (an average of 32kgs per day) in year 2007. The cow has finished her 13<sup>th</sup> lactation and has had 12 normal calves.

## **Services Provided by the Ayrshire Cattle Breeders Society of Kenya (Cleopas Okore)**

### **1. Holding field days across the country**

Last year in November the Society held a very successful field day in Trans-Nzoia district. The field day was organised in conjunction with the Ministry of Livestock Development in the district. The District Livestock Production Officer and the District Veterinary Officer played a big role in local organisation to ensure that the field day was a success.

### **2. Training of fudges and Breed Inspectors**

From time to time the Society trains Ayrshire judges and Inspectors. This activity came up in realisation that the Society was not having adequate number of judges to service in the many ASK Shows spread out in the country. It was further noticed that the Show registration of the breed was due to lack of breed inspectors. The Society, in realisation of this took advantage of the Livestock Breeder Show and Sale last year to organise these course which was attended by around 30 participants. We realise that there is still huge demand for inspectors and that the society will continue further training to meet the demand.

### **3. Advising Members on the top Ayrshire bulls locally and internationally**

The society provides information about bulls to the Members who therefore source for the recommended ones. Further the Society decides of decides of which Ayrshire bulls are used for Contract Mating Programme for the bull recruitment for the Central Artificial Insemination Station.

### **4. Membership of the Bull Purchasing Committee (BPC)**

The society is a member of the Central Artificial Insemination Station (CAIS) Bull Purchasing Committee.

## **5. Participation in Shows and Exhibitions**

The society members exhibit in the local Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) Shows and the Livestock Breeders Show and Sale. The society provides judges and stewards to officiate at these shows.

## **6. Organisation of Committee and Annual General Meetings**

## **7. Promotion of Ayrshire breed in the East African Region**

The Ayrshire society members have been promoting the breed within the East African region in order to expand the market for our members' animals. This has been done through visits to some of these countries by the society members and also exchange of information on the breed. This interaction has yielded fruits as the demand for the breed has been enhanced in the region with more enquiries coming in for the breed.