

## Judging in Kenya

We travelled 370 km northwest from Nairobi, heading for Kitale which is very close to the Ugandan border. This trip took us over a day to do. While travelling to Kitale we crossed the equator and the altitude was 9100 feet above sea level. Through part of this area was the Rift Valley, which was hotter than in the basin where there was more beef, sheep and goats grazed and also greenhouses growing flowers for export which covered hundreds of hectares. There are a number of lakes at the bottom of the Rift Valley – some are fresh water and some are alkaline. Over recent years the lakes have been rising and now cover a lot of land that used to be exposed. A lot of these lakes have no outlets. Some land is irrigated from the lake and lucerne grows well in these conditions. There is considerable land in the valley that is owned by the government and you just graze it free of charge although it doesn't appear to grow much anyway, especially without irrigation.

A lot of the country areas have no power, however there are some small solar panels to charge batteries to run the radio, maybe a TV. There are many areas that make their own charcoal. The beehives are different from ours as they hang from trees rather than sitting on the ground as ours do. Saw some cactus fences, although in general there are not a lot of fences throughout the countryside.

Those long distance runners that come from Kenya and generally do well in the Olympic Games tend to be all from the one tribe, and they live at the top of the Rift Valley around 8000 feet above sea level and higher. They have a training centre there called Iten – home of Champions. There is quite a steep road from there to the base of the valley, dropping some 5000 ft plus, which they run and back up and are not even puffing when they have finished. In the past this tribe used to run down to the valley floor, steal cattle and chase them back up. The tribe that lived at the bottom were simply not fit enough to keep up and consequently lost their cattle. After hundreds of years of this it appears that it is bred into these people to run.

## Land & Cattle

The soil in a lot of areas tends to be very red in colour and is fertile. The high country grows very good maize crops – often 9 ft tall. Most crops are sown by hand and when you see thousands of acres planted, this is quite a feat. Some kale is also grown. Other crops grown are wheat, barley and dates. The grass species grown

are kikuyu which appears to be the most common, other species include Rhodes grass which is generally used for hay, star grass which looks like paspalum to me and that is also used for hay. Napier grass which grows up to 2 metres tall has a high moisture content and low protein content and is generally grown in the lower altitude areas for stock food. A legume called Desmodium is also grown to help balance the napier grass.

The main dairy breed in Kenya is the Holstein-Friesian at about 1.8 million. The Ayrshire breed is next at around 1.2 million in numbers, of which about 40,000 are registered. There is quite a variation in the herds as to size, condition and productivity. There tends to be lots of small herds (2-5 cows) and these herds are often grazed on the roadside during the day and at night are back on their owners land. The condition of these animals was often not good with a condition score of no more than 3 and producing at less than 10 litres of milk per day. Sometimes these animals just roam the roadsides under supervision while others are tethered by their nose, neck or rear leg. What often happens is that the families use the night milk for themselves as there is no cooling and they sell the morning milk to the Co-operative, selling approx 3 litres per cow per day. While there I visited a smaller Co-operative dairy factory processing around 40,000 – 50,000 litres of milk per day and in the peak up to 60,000 litres. This Co-operative has 5000 suppliers which means about 10 litres of milk per day from the average supplier. 90% of the milk processed is sold as fresh pasteurized milk and the balance is made into yoghurt, ghee (butter oil) and cream. The main market for their produce is Nairobi. The larger herds tend to be much

better fed and I was told of milk weights of 30 litres plus per day on individual cows. The young stock on all farms tended to be much smaller for their age than I would have expected, but the mature cows looked very good, and to the credit of these farmers their cows around 12 years old only looked like 6 year olds. Some of the best older cows I saw were sired by Bankend Lord Ontario. Some of these older cows were potential bull dams for the AI Company. Unfortunately with only around 4% of cattle herd tested (or milk recorded) there is not a lot of selection for a bull dam. One thing that really was obvious was the importance of breeding cattle to suit their environment, with mineral inputs and pasture based feeding systems, the genetics used in Kenya needs to be far more adapted towards a grassland farming environment than any other form of feeding. The mature cows on these bigger dairy farms tended to have Canadian, USA or British influence within their genetics, while the younger animals had some Scandinavian influence. Overall big potential in Kenya with improved pasture management, pasture species, genetics and rearing practices.

## **The Shows**

I attended two shows, the first on the outskirts of Nairobi. This show is held every two years with the major sponsor being Brookside Dairy Ltd which is the largest dairy company in Kenya with approx 85-90% of the countries milk supply. This is a national show with four dairy breeds, dual purpose, beef breeds of cattle as well as sheep and goats. There are also a lot of trade exhibitors as well, and the show has a huge following from the farming sector. The classes were somewhat different from what we have here but covered the ages. The classes were under 1 year, 1 yr & under 2 yrs, 2 yrs & under 3 yrs (in calf but not yet in milk), 3 yrs & under 5 yrs in milk, 3 yrs & under 5 yrs dry and in calf, 5 yrs & over in milk and 5 yrs & over dry & in calf. These basically are the individual classes, also junior, intermediate and senior championships, finishing off with a supreme breed championship. The dairy show was over three days with breed showing on the first two days and the interbreed on the third day. There were good numbers in most classes and the higher placed animals would not have been out of place at our shows here, particularly with a little bit more training and preparation. The prize money was very good and with transport subsidy there was plenty of encouragement given here. Overall the standard of cattle was very acceptable. The interbreed day had several classes in the dairy section but the main two were supreme dairy champion female and then breed teams of seven animals of each of the dairy breeds and the Breed Society were to nominate each team of seven animals.

The second show I attended was at Nakuru, and this was a regional show. It was a considerably smaller show but there were some good animals there as well. Some animals were the same as at the Brookside show, but not many.

### **Kenya Animal Genetics Resource Centre**

The KAGRC is where the AI bulls are all resident. The Ayrshires account for 44% of all the bulls, a total of 52 bulls. The bulls on centre are sired by off shire genetics and out of selected dams in Kenya. Some of these dams have produced over 8000 litres of milk. With the low percentage of herd testing (around 4%) the bulls used on AI never get much progeny information, if any, so the bulls stay on centre producing semen, some as 10+ years old.

Kenya has produced and distributed up to 645,000 straws of all breeds annually and there is another 300,000 straws of offshore semen sold in Kenya annually, a total of over 900,000 straws. Ayrshires are in demand by the neighbouring countries and are sold for between NZ\$1900 - \$2500.

In summary, a worthwhile trip, with a lot of potential in Kenya. My thanks to my hosts and to the Ayrshire Cattle Breeders Society of Kenya for their invitation to judge and their superb hospitality.