

## Farm Innovation Visits

### Beef Breeding Visit to Wales/England

3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019

#### Day 1

- **Easyjet flight from Belfast International Airport- Liverpool Airport**  
08.20-9.20 hrs
- **Genus ABS Ruthin Freezing Unit & Bull Stud Ruthin LL15 2UP**  
-10.30-13.30 hrs. The visit focused on Genus development work and the day to day management and running of their business. Arwel Owen, Genus Beef Specialist and James Hudson, Stud Manager on beef breeding, talked to the group in a classroom from which we observed a parade of their top Limousin and British blue sires, and a semen collection from two of the stud's dairy bulls. We also toured their laboratories and had detailed discussions about management of bulls, artificial insemination and sexed semen production. The group were impressed by the level of professionalism and technical input by Genus staff during this visit but felt that the company focus was on Dairy businesses and not beef.
- **Lunch**  
13.30-14.00 hrs. Genus ABS, Ruthin
- **Dairy Farm visit, Rob & Judith Faulkner, Ellesmere**  
-14.30 16.00 hrs, 350 Dairy Cow herd & calf rearing unit.  
Focus of visit was on rearing and marketing of British Blue cross Holstein calves. It included a very good guided tour of new calf rearing unit and open detailed discussion with Judith and Rob on management of the unit. Calves sold at 10 weeks of age in local market or at 10 mths of age to a finisher.  
This visit impressed the group, particularly the quality of the calves and the expertise of Judith at rearing them
- **Beef Farm Visit, SJR & HJ Jones & Sons, Hilley Farm, Shrewsbury**  
-16.30 -18.30 hrs. 800 acre farm growing Cereals (150 acres maize), 30000 pullet unit and 170 suckler cows, calves sold as yearlings. Focus of the visit was on the use of Genus RMS to tighten up the calving pattern, reduce calf mortality through calving ease and improve calf quality by using superior genetics. The procedure was discussed in detail. It involved bringing the 170 cows into yards each day for six weeks during the breeding period (June/July) for observation and examination of each cow for signs of heat by the Genus technician. Cows are inseminated or marked with crayon before being returned to the main batch and the field. Good discussion and questioning took place.

The group were disappointed by the overall quality of calves and cows, the lack of available facts and figures and the minimal use of technology by the farmer and the Genus technicians on this farm.

- **Hawkstone Park Hotel, Weston, Shrewsbury**  
19.30 hrs Tuesday - 09.00hrs Wednesday. Good rooms, food and hospitality in the hotel.

## Day 2

- **Blade Rearing Unit, Messrs Huxley, Shifnal**  
10.00-12.00 hrs. This visit focused on calf rearing and the Blade farming fully integrated beef supply chain. In this system farmers are contracted to rear calves and/or take them through to finish as beef.  
Mr Huxley converted from Dairy farming to Blade calf rearing as his dairy farm required a large financial investment to upgrade dairying facilities. He didn't want this commitment.  
Mr Huxley contract rears batches of 90 calves for six weeks which are then transferred to other farms for finishing. We viewed his facilities and discussed calf rearing in detail. The facilities cost £250,000 and included automated milk and meal feeding and monitoring of calves using electronic tagging. The calves were mostly Aberdeen Angus cross from dairy herds. Arwel and Philip from Genus attended the visit and explained how Genus are linked into the Blade supply chain supplying specific beef semen to the dairy farmers. Richard Phelps and James Draper from ABP who own Blade were in attendance to explain the workings of the contracts.  
The group were impressed with this visit in particular the quality of the calves on the farm and the details which the farmer provided to the group about the practical aspects of his rearing system and the benefits of having the technologies in place. We did not however receive a lot of detail about the financial aspects or on the profitability of the system. The group were well impressed with this visit and the work being undertaken.
- **Tour Wrap up session**  
18.00-18.45 hrs. The group openly discussed the tour and all felt that it was a good trip and that each person had learned something and benefited from it. They felt that it had a focus on dairy calf rearing systems and that Genus are more focused on dairy farmers and calf rearing than suckled calf production. They weren't impressed by the suckler farm visited as no data was available and the quality of stock was average. They said that if the suckler cow farm visited had more technologies to demonstrate with data and information available the entire trip would have been very good.  
They would go on the trip again if asked but only if a better suckler cow farm was included in the itinerary.

- **Evening Meal Antelope Inn, Lighthorne, Warwick**  
19.00-21.00 hrs. Very good meal provided
- **Ibis Hotel, Birmingham Airport**  
Wednesday 22.00hrs- Thursday 06.30 hrs. Very good facilities

### **Day 3**

- **Easyjet return flight Birmingham Airport to Belfast International Airport**  
08.30-09.30 hrs.