

# High attendance and a great event success

## BEEF EXPO 2015

This year's Beef Expo held at York for the first time has been hailed a resounding success. **Wendy Short** reports

**T**HIS year's Beef Expo, which was held at York Auction mart on May 22, was declared a resounding success, with two Welsh farmers dominating the competition classes, more than 7,000 visitors and a high attendance at seminars.

The overall champion of the Beef Expo National Spring Spectacular classes was Sooty, a Limousin cross heifer aged 17 months and weighing in at 547kgs. Bred by the Bowen family of Welshpool, the heifer was exhibited by Rhidian and Cai Edwards, of Corwen, Denbighshire.

Reserve supreme champion was Midnight Black, a Limousin cross steer, owned and bred by TA & LC Lyon & Sons.

Meanwhile, Tecwyn Jones, of Conway, took the red ribbon in the Baby Beef classes with the 420kgs Black Beauty, another Limousin cross heifer.

In the Young Handler classes, the 12-16-year-old category was won by Ellin Wyn Roberts, showing Eye Style, with top prize in the 17-21-year-old section going to Hannah Donaldson and Hoity Toity.

The individual winner of the

Future Beef Farmer Challenge was Northampton-based James Bonnar, a 25-year-old who works on the family beef and arable unit.

The group prize went to Askham Agrics, a team made up of four students from Askham Bryan College – sisters Emily and Amanda Watson from Durham, Becky Green from Derbyshire and Nicola Terry from Ripon.

A new competition, designed to test the showing skills of livestock auctioneers, attracted entries from a number of mart representatives, with Trevor Simpson, of Hexham and Northern Marts, declared the winner of the Auctioneers' Handler Challenge.

### EID TECHNOLOGY SEMINAR

Delegates at the event, which was organised by the National



**OVERALL CHAMPION:** Beef Expo 2015 overall champion, Sooty, a Limousin cross heifer

Beef Association and held at York for the first time in its history, heard a presentation from beef producer, Robert Neill, of Upper Nisbet Farm, near Jedburgh. He investigated the use of electronic identification (EID) for cattle, as part of his Nuffield farming scholarship. Mr Neill currently uses the system to manage data generated by his 300-cow Limousin cross dairy suckler herd, which are put to a Limousin or British Blue bull.

He said: "EID makes cattle handling a more enjoyable process and increases accuracy. It is also safer, as the operator does not have to stand at the animal's head to read the tag number and the cattle are more settled."

"The technology can be used in conjunction with three-way shedding and can contain a range of data including parentage, birthdates and medical treatments, as well as working out daily liveweight gains. It allows me to weigh 40-50 cattle in only ten minutes."

Mr Neill clarified some of the confusion that exists for the different types of electronic cattle identification systems available.

He said: "HDX technology allows for the transfer of data in one direction at a time, in

the same way that a walkie-talkie operates. FDX systems allow data to be transferred in two directions, in a similar way to a telephone, where two parties can talk at the same time. As the more complicated option, FDX technology is more expensive."

Mr Neill said that while sheep EID tag chip numbers matched the animal's written number, the system for cattle was more complex.

"Cattle chip numbers have to be pre-programmed, with the UK number featured on the outside of the tag cross-referenced to an individual chip number," he said.

"This requires a text file, which is supplied by the tag manufacturer, to be imported to the producer's livestock management computer software and to the tag reader hardware, in order for the visual and electronic numbers to be matched up."

"This process is much too complicated and I would strongly urge the industry to lobby for a simpler solution, similar to the system used for sheep EID."

### PNEUMONIA PREVENTION SEMINAR

Phil Alcock, of Bishopton Vets, told delegates that a

number of measures needed to be combined to reduce the risk of cattle pneumonia, a disease which cost the industry millions of pounds each year.

There are a number of different viruses and bacteria that can cause pneumonia and one of the best ways to avoid problems is to ensure the animals are fed well, to give them the ability to fight off or recover from infections.

"Six or seven-week-old calves from dairy farms that are bought at auction marts, for example, may have received as much as six to seven litres of milk before being transported," Phil said.

"However, once they reach their destination, their new keepers often underestimate how much milk they require and this could cause a nutritional growth check and make them more vulnerable to disease."

"At this age, the single stomach will be used to digest milk, as the rumen will not yet be fully developed. When the calf receives stimuli linked to feeding, it triggers a reflex. This affects the esophageal groove, which channels milk directly into the abomasum. If this reflex does not occur, then milk may enter the rumen, leading to reduced feed effi-



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**Robert Neill, farmer**

against pneumonia at housing. "Vaccination is not a cure-all and will not protect calves from every strain of the disease, but it is helpful if the injection is performed correctly," he said. "However, one survey found that fewer than half of all the vaccines given to livestock are carried out according to the manufacturer's instructions. "Vaccines should not be stored for any length of time on the dashboard of the farm vehicle. Ideally, cold bags can be used to keep the product cool, in the period between removing it from storage and giving it to calves."

**HEAT DETECTION/  
CALVING TECHNOLOGY  
SEMINAR**

Jonathan Statham, of Bishopton Vets, gave a run-down of the latest technology that could be used to speed up genetic progress in the national beef herd. A range of devices were commonly used for the purpose in dairy herds, but the practicalities of applying the principles to beef herds had proved more of a challenge.

"Several trials have been carried out on beef herds, with varying success. But the technology is improving all the time and I expect that heat detection systems will eventually become commonplace within the industry," said Mr Statham. "The main benefit will be to allow producers access to AI sires that are far superior, in genetic terms, compared with the average stock bull."

One method for of detecting oestrus is the use of activity collars or ankle bracelets, which are linked to remote sensors.

When a cow comes into heat, she becomes far more active. The equipment records activity spikes and can be programmed to alert producers to the onset of heat via a text message.

Another option for heat detection is through temperature monitoring, which can also be used to alert the producer to the onset of calving.

"A cow's temperature rises when she comes into heat and falls as she approaches calving," he said.

"We have been involved in trialling a temperature bolus, which is positioned in the cow's rumen.

"This equipment can be set to record the animal's temperature 200 times a day and will send a phone text alert if there are significant changes."

**CONSUMER  
EDUCATION**

Farmer and television personality Adam Henson attended Beef Expo in his role as farming ambassador for Lloyds Bank.

He said that his contact with the non-farming indicated a high level of support for

British producers, but stressed there was still work to be done when it came to communication.

"The British public are hungry for knowledge about farming and food production and as an industry, we have become more engaged with consumers, whether it's through radio and television shows, farmers' markets and open farm events," said Mr Henson.

"As farmers, we need to talk honestly about our businesses and maintain our integrity – I think the public appreciate these qualities and I see little point in dressing up facts to

give a false, chocolate box image."

Despite the progress made by the agricultural industry as a whole, there still remained some misunderstanding, he added.

"I have heard stories of consumers thinking that a sheep has to be killed, in order to harvest its wool.

"That proves that we need to do more, in terms of interaction.

"There are many ways in which a farmer can get involved, including blogging, opening up the farm and setting up a Facebook page."



**BEEF  
PRODUCER:**  
Robert Neill, of  
Upper Nisbet  
Farm, near  
Jedburgh

ciency and possible digestive upsets."

He pointed out that weaning too early was another cause of poor food conversion rates and disease vulnerability. An average-sized calf should not be weaned, until it was taking 1.5kgs of concentrate each day.

"Care should be taken when batch-weaning, as some calves in the group may not have reached this intake level," he said.

"The development of the rumen relies mainly on the calf eating concentrate feeds, although a small amount of fibre, such as hay or straw, can be offered."

Adequate ventilation would also reduce the occurrence of pneumonia, he said.

"Ventilation cannot be addressed simply by installing a standard fan. The main priority is to remove moisture from the building," he said.

"The stack effect, which is based on heat from the cattle rising upward to take moist air out through a roof ridge, will not work for calves. They are too small to generate enough heat.

"Mechanical ventilation is necessary, so that fresh air is pumped into the building. Another good option is an outdoor calf hutch, although the bedding must be kept clean and dry if the system is to be effective."

Mr Alcock advised producers to vaccinate their calves



**PNEUMONIA RISK:** Phil Alcock, of Bishopton Vets