

# HOLSTEIN FRIESIANS IN IRELAND

The first Friesian Cattle were imported into Ireland after the First World War. They came mainly from England & Scotland. They formed a very small nucleus of Friesian Herds in the early years.

Being an island we have always enjoyed a good health status. Our Government determined to protect this health status, may have been over zealous by denying Irish Breeders access to outside Genetics for the next 30 years.

## Shorthorn to Friesian

Our National Herd hitherto was shorthorn, but when the progeny of the first Friesian Bulls standing in Irish AI calved down in the early '50's, the switch to Friesian was rapid. It was their ability to out yield the Shorthorn and other breeds that impressed the progressive dairy farmer. It is this ability to produce more milk and produce it more efficiently that gives the Holstein Friesian the advantage over all other breeds, and this advantage must be maintained. Within a few years our National Herd was 95% Black & White and remains so to the present day.



**Lisduff Begonia 109 -**  
a successful show cow in the early '80



**Moneymore Bunty 6**  
50% Holstein, popularised the holstein  
during the 80's

## Holstein Importation

Our first Holsteins were imported from Canada in 1974, eight bulls for AI and 30 females for Pedigree Herds.

By this time many of our Friesians had deteriorated in production because of a Government Breeding Policy designed totally to improving the beefing qualities of our Friesians, as most of our beef cattle that time were bred from the dairy herd.

When the progeny of these Holstein bulls calved down, their ability to outmilk the majority of Friesians again captivated the farmer in the milking parlour and the switch to Holstein was as rapid as the switch to Friesian a decade earlier.

## The Irish Herdbook

The progeny of the first imported Friesians were registered with the British Friesian Cattle Society in Rickmansworth. This arrangement continued until the year 2000.

In 2000, a centralised National Database was established under the auspices of the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF). This is a state of the art database, where every detail of every animal in Ireland is stored, from birth to slaughter. The IHFA being shareholders in ICBF draw all pedigree information from this National Database. This database replaced the HUKI Database for Irish animals so our business arrangement with HUKI terminated and the large bank of ancestry information was transferred from HUKI to ICBF.

The Management of HUKI understood that linking to the Irish Database was the correct option and assisted us in every way with the changeover. Although we are no longer business partners, thankfully the camaraderie and friendships between the two Societies and members on both islands still exists and I am delighted to see such a formidable team here from HUKI and so many old friends, both breeders and staff.

The formation of an independent Irish Herdbook, an Irish office and the simplifying of the Registration process, where one notification catered for the compulsory passport, pedigree registration and milk recording, has led to increased membership and pedigree registrations.

At present the Irish Holstein Friesian Association has 3,750 members who register over 70,000 females annually. Our partnership with ICBF and the National Database after a turbulent start is now working fluently.

In Ireland, we have a cow for every 2 people ie. 1.1 million dairy cows and 1.1 million beef cows. The dairy herd is 95% Holstein Friesian although Scientists and Journalists have consistently promoted alternatives and are now aggressively promoting cross breeding to improve fertility in strictly Spring Calving Herds.

### **Production Systems:**

Green is the colour most associated with Ireland, because of our mild climate and high rainfall, Ireland is always green and we can grow grass for most of the year. On many farms, particularly Southern areas, cows graze grass for up to 10 months of the year.

The farming system practiced by a majority of dairy producers in Ireland is a compact Spring Calving System, where the cows calve during February & March and are

dried off in November. While yields per cow on these farms is low, it leaves the biggest margin per gallon where quota is the restriction. Almost all the milk is produced from grazed grass with about (0.5 tonnes) concentrates fed per cow. A medium sized, stronger type, high protein Holstein, a Holstein Friesian cross or a pure Friesian suits this system.

Traditionally the pedigree sector in Ireland supplied liquid milk all year round to the cities and large towns, milk volume and good conformation were the main criteria in their breeding programme. Many others have Winter Milk contracts and adopt a split Spring and Autumn calving pattern

These breeders have invested heavily in the best genetics available world wide. Most of the World's leading cow families have been imported over the past 20 years and now we have cows and herds that can compare favourably with the best anywhere.

These breeders all classify regularly and many take part in Showing, supporting their local show, with the cream of the crop competing at four National Shows, the National Spring Fair, the National Livestock Show, Baileys Champion Cow and the National Dairy Show.



**Irish Cows enjoying the sunshine and lush grass**



**Lumville Danoise 2**  
Bailey's Champion Cow '08



**Amondene Biddy 270**  
National Spring Fair  
Champion '08

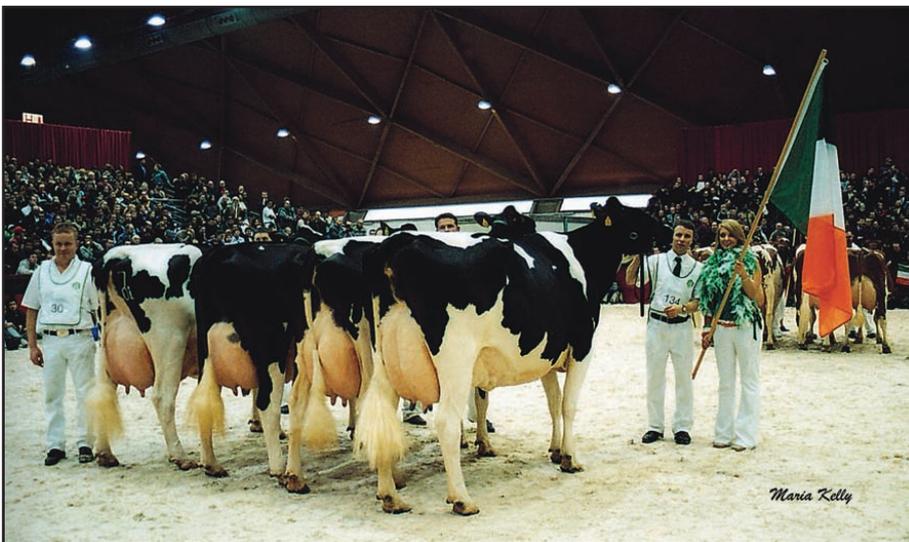


**Smearlview A Storm Vixan**  
National Dairy Show Champion  
Oct. '07

### International Competition

Due to our island isolation, international competition is difficult, but our last sojourn to the European Championships in Brussels 2004 was very successful, winning 3 classes, Senior & Overall Champion and the Country Group.

These pedigree breeders by providing the seed stock for most commercial herds have played a major role in the increased yield and improved conformation of our National Herd.



**Winning Country Group Agribex, Brussels 2004**

Improved fertility and a higher Protein % are new criteria, taken on board in recent years because  
a) These are important traits for everybody, but vital for the Spring Calving System.  
b) There is now excellent information available from our National database on these traits.

The challenge now is to improve these traits while maintaining the efficiency and conformation achieved over years of constructive pedigree breeding.

I hope this background gives you an understanding of the diverse milk production systems in Ireland and I am satisfied that we have sufficient diversity within our breed to suit every system.

### Welcome

May I take this opportunity to welcome all our foreign visitors, thank you for taking the time and making the effort to come. I hope you have a very informative and enjoyable few days and that you leave Ireland with some fond memories.