

**WHERE SCIENCE AND THE SHOW RING MEET**  
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It is with great pleasure that I present to you my paper entitled 'Where Science and the Show ring meet'. I am honoured to be invited to speak at this World Holstein Scientific Conference. I am proud of the showcase of cattle that you are going to see on Friday and Saturday in Millstreet and I am proud of the current Irish cattle breeding infrastructure. When preparing for today, I was reminded by the quote from Charles Darwin that 'it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change'.

We in Ireland have learned this, and that is why Ireland is now the best place in the world to be if you want to breed cattle. This did not happen by accident, it is the result of the efforts of progressive herdowners and breeders throughout Ireland, work done by a supportive and dynamic Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, work done by a world class dairy research centre in Moorepark and work done by an excellent breed society the IHFA. Our cattle breeding industry has at its pivot the ICBF. The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) is a world class organisation founded by the breed societies, farming organisations and AI and milk recording industries each of which now serve on the ICBF's board. It is a coalition of the willing in the truest sense.

You can experience for yourself first hand 'where science and the show ring meet' this weekend by attending Millstreet and speaking with ICBF.

The show ring is the showcase of the dairy industry; all industries need a showcase whether it is Croke Park on All Ireland final day for our national games Gaelic football and hurling or Wimbledon for tennis. The majority of consumers of our dairy products are now at least one generation removed from agriculture. This is a new departure for Irish agriculture. National and local shows give consumers an opportunity to understand and identify with the farmer: the producer of the food consumed at their breakfast table each morning. Farmers can no longer assume that agricultural issues are innately understood, discussed or accepted by the population at large. The image of the well manicured pampered beauty queen alleviates any concerns the consumer may have regarding consuming and enjoying dairy products at the expense of animal welfare. Shows help bridge that gap - they allow consumers to touch, feel, and smell and for a while 'live country life' for a short while.

Investors are required in all industries; we need to make the cattle breeding industry attractive to them. The show ring with its glamour, buzz and competitive edge will aid in the attraction of investors who in turn will drive forward the wheels of science and the acquisition of genetics.

The show ring can be divided into two, the activity that takes within the circular rope and the activities that take place on the outside of the rope!

The show ring gives us an opportunity to evaluate the functional traits of the breed, to appreciate the developmental stages of the animal from calf through to heifer, first calver and finally the mature cow. The fundamentals of the breed and the breed standard are determined by the show ring. Judges training and the experience gained in the ring allow us to critically evaluate animals, develop the internationally currency that is the type classification system. The genetic evaluations on linear type are totally dependent on the scorer's ability to evaluate animals.

The continuous development of judges and scorers who can accurately evaluate cattle are critical to breed development and the development of international indices. Breeders especially those that compete develop 'an eye' for evaluating cattle, they then assess their own more critically, they challenge sire proofs, improve methods of evaluating by engaging with geneticists and engage with breeding programme managers.

The family farm is the ideal system whereby a young child can get involved in the showing of a calf and from there develop an intense interest in the breed. The future of our breed is dependent on attracting and retaining the brightest and best breeders and scientists to work in the industry. How are these people attracted to our industry? We need to attract them when they are young, get them involved and excited about it to allow them develop an understanding of it. If they enjoy it they will chose it as a career. The best geneticists are those with a massive enthusiasm for the breed combined with an inherent knowledge of the industry.

The ringside is a meeting place for likeminded people with an interest in showing and breeding cattle to discuss and exchange views on all breeding issues. Breeding values, new sires, breeding programmes, changes in the industry, profitability, latest advice from the scientific world and the latest purchases national and international get discussed. The scientists that attend the ringside benefit greatly from these informal discussions and those attached to genetic companies need breeders to showcase the progeny of their latest sire.

Balanced breeding leads to the sustainability and the profitability of a breed. Breeders drive the direction of cattle breeding and therefore have the responsibility of maintaining and improving all profitable traits. Breeding values are extremely important, however they are not the driver of the car, and they are the lights of the car. Over simplification of cattle breeding believing it to be a process of addition and subtraction is of grave concern. Breeding high indexed cattle is a flawed objective; the objective is the production of profitable cattle and the continuous development of a meaningful index system that will allow us to do so.

We know from even the scanist glance at media reports in the last few weeks that we live in perilous times. We face enormous challenges nationally and globally. But what has been of vital importance throughout this time has been leadership. Leadership is the key to success- whatever your industry. This is abundantly evident in Holstein breeding as it is anywhere else- you are in safe hands.

The business of the showring and the business of science is, to borrow from Seamus Heaney 'a compound of energy and artifice' - you will see much 'energy and artifice' in the showrings of Millstreet this weekend. These are the ingredients of our industry'