

BEEF BREED SOCIETIES - THEIR FUTURE ROLE

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In this short paper a point of view is put forward to suggest why Breed Societies act as they do and some ideas as to the order their priorities should take in the future. These opinions expressed are purely personal.

Breed Societies have fulfilled a traditional role as "watchdog" in the past. This role has been a vital function in the establishment and selection of our traditional beef breeding herd. This has proved a most suitable and reliable base on which breeders can build their future selection programs.

However, in their drive and determination to achieve this "watchdog" role and often because of excess conservatism generated from group decisions, many innovative ideas put forward by individuals have not been acted upon. This has produced in many outsiders' minds the image of Breed Societies being closed groups, lacking in imagination and drive and to be avoided at all costs. This is not the true picture, although perhaps conservative Breed Societies are made up of extremely conscientious breeders with very strong ideals and with the future of their particular breed truly at heart.

Perhaps showing performance and "gut feelings" have been somewhat over-emphasised in past selection procedures, but just what other way was there? Scientists have been among the main critics, but much of the past criticism has not been constructive. A 'stand-off' situation developed and has been augmented from both sides. These attitudes still persist in some quarters. Nevertheless, few workable alternatives have been suggested and little assistance has been offered to develop practical workable selection schemes. We have seen the most development in this area in recent years with the introduction of NBRS and of pilot Sire Reference Schemes in some breeds.

The possibilities suggested for A.I. have not realised their early aspirations and perhaps the reasons are disappointing results, few good records on comparative performance of progeny groups and sires of inferior genetic worth for beef production, and the earlier problems of heat detection in large herds on open range.

Commercial producers have probably made as much use of A.I. as stud breeders, however, in the past stud breeders would not accept the standard of the majority of sires standing at A.B. Centres. Frequently little objective information was available on these sires. In turn, many leading commercial breeders have been dissatisfied with what the stud breeder has produced, believing his ideals to be too closely related to showing fads and has in turn, sought to breed his own or use A.I. to overcome these restrictions.

Field servicing by the stud sector of the industry has left much to be desired. The concept of a central records office for all pedigree animals has to be considered more fully, as Breed Societies will not be able to survive in their present form if overheads continue to escalate to the same degree that has taken place in the past five years. Breeds that will make most progress in the future will no doubt have introduced mandatory performance recording and national sire monitoring schemes, and a further awareness that stud breeders will only prosper if commercial producers are viable.