

ESTONIAN BEEF CATTLE ASSOCIATION AND ITS HISTORY

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The breeding of beef cattle became consistent in Estonia in 1978 when the import of mainly Hereford cattle from the former Soviet republics as well as from Denmark and Finland began. About 650 cows were bought in six years. This breeding material was of mediocre quality.

In 1982, the Club of Estonian Hereford Breeders was founded (with Aigar Suurmaa as president). Ties of friendship were established with the Scandinavian countries. The club became a member of the European Hereford Breeders Association in 1991 and a member of the World Hereford Breeders Association in 2000.



Hereford herd in the pastures

A. Suurmaa

When Estonia regained its independence, there was a big recession in our animal production and also in our beef cattle husbandry. A third out of 2,000 beef cows remained. Due to difficult times in beef cattle husbandry, the Hereford Club lost its importance and was liquidated.



Leino Vessart, Ivari Padar, ex-minister of agriculture (1999-2002) and farmers

A. Suurmaa

A group of Limousin breeders got organised in the middle of the 1990s on the initiative of Leino Vessart. Meanwhile, tens of cows of Aberdeen Angus breed were imported from Finland and young cattle of Charolais breed from Sweden. As the population of Limousin cattle increased, the Estonian Beef Cattle Association was founded in addition to the Breeding Co-operative "Estonian Red Cattle" in 2000. It had a board of three members, chaired by Leino Vessart, manager of the Karitsalu Experimental farm. Their primary task was to unite all beef cattle farmers and to increase the population of beef cows. It was very difficult as beef cattle farming was not a profitable branch of animal husbandry. In the long negotiation process they managed to convince the Ministry of Agriculture of the necessity to pay state support for milking cows. By now, milking cows and heifers over 8 months of age have received state support for three years.

2.25 million kroons was received as state support for buying 130 pedigree animals from abroad in 2002. Estonian Beef Cattle Association buys in beef cattle at a higher price and finds a proper market for the sale of meat and meat products.

The Estonian Beef Cattle Association organises training days for beef cattle breeders every year, because their number increases constantly, but they lack experience. The association has also done a good job in fighting for a bigger quota of milking cows (13,416) from the European Union, which ensures the constant increase in the number of beef cattle for several years, because according to Agricultural Registers and Information Board, there are only 1,370 milking cows in Estonia.

The support for the culling of young bulls and the support for heifers over 8 months of age of a milking cow have brought about increase in beef cattle population.



Highland cattle – a popular beef breed

H. Viinalass

Table 1. Number of beef cattle according to ARIB* and ARC (17 March 2004)**

ARIB registry				ARC registry				
breed	cattle	including		cattle	including			
	total	cows	heifers	total	cows	heifers	purebred	crossbreeds
Hf	3418	642	1591	2056	484	1002	244	1812
Ab	2880	361	1488	1574	336	880	114	1460
Li	2849	279	1444	1471	265	810	84	1387
Ch	262	23	133	159	28	83	39	120
Hc	131	44	48	97	29	40	32	65
Pi	106	17	56	58	19	34	0	58
Si	14	1	11	11	0	10	11	0
Ba	9	2	4	5	1	2	4	1
Bb	2	2	0	3	2	1	0	3

*) ARIB – Agricultural Registers and Information Board; **) ARC – Animal Recording Centre;

- Hf - Hereford, Ab - Aberdeen Angus, Li - Limousin, Ch - Charolais, Hc - Highland cattle, Pi – Piemontese, Si - Simmental, Ba - Blonde d'Aquitaine, Bb - Belgian Blue.



Aberdeen Angus bull Joker at Ülenurme

A. Juus

There are five breeds that are used and raised – Hereford, Aberdeen Angus, Limousin and Charolais, Highland cattle as an exotic nature preserver. These breeds, as well as Piemontese, Belgian Blue, Blonde d'Aquitaine etc., may be used for functional cross-breeding (Table 1).

The sale of semen has been the following: 12,024 doses in 2002 and 13,065 doses in 2003. Beef cattle breeders make minimal use of artificial insemination.

The biggest beef cattle herds are the Karitsu Rantso OÜ (Limousin) with 148 cows, OÜ Talandia (Hereford) with 106 cows, Arne Tamm OÜ (Hereford) with 94 cows, OÜ Maasikamäe Lihakari (Aberdeen Angus) with 84 cows, Evalo Agro OÜ (Charolais) with 72 cows etc.

It is the task of Estonian Beef Cattle Association, together with Animal Breeders' Association of Estonia, Animal Recording Centre and specialists from the Estonian Agricultural University, to work out a breeding programme for beef cattle and a strategy for beef production. It is needed to find out beef cattle breeds suitable for breeding in Estonia:

- 1) as pedigree animals;
- 2) for functional cross-breeding with dairy breeds;
- 3) for in-breeding in order to improve the quality of carcass and meat.