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MARCHIGIANA, CHIANINA, ROMAGNOLA,
MAREMMANA AND PODOLICA CATTLE**



16th YEAR Number 1/2009



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SUMMARY

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- 5**
Everyone's mad about the Istrian!
- 10**
Chianina cattle conquers Savigliano
- 13**
Considerations on calving ease
- 16**
Meeting about theriogenology
- 18**
From England: Edward Towers' farm



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La scelta giusta per allevare meglio



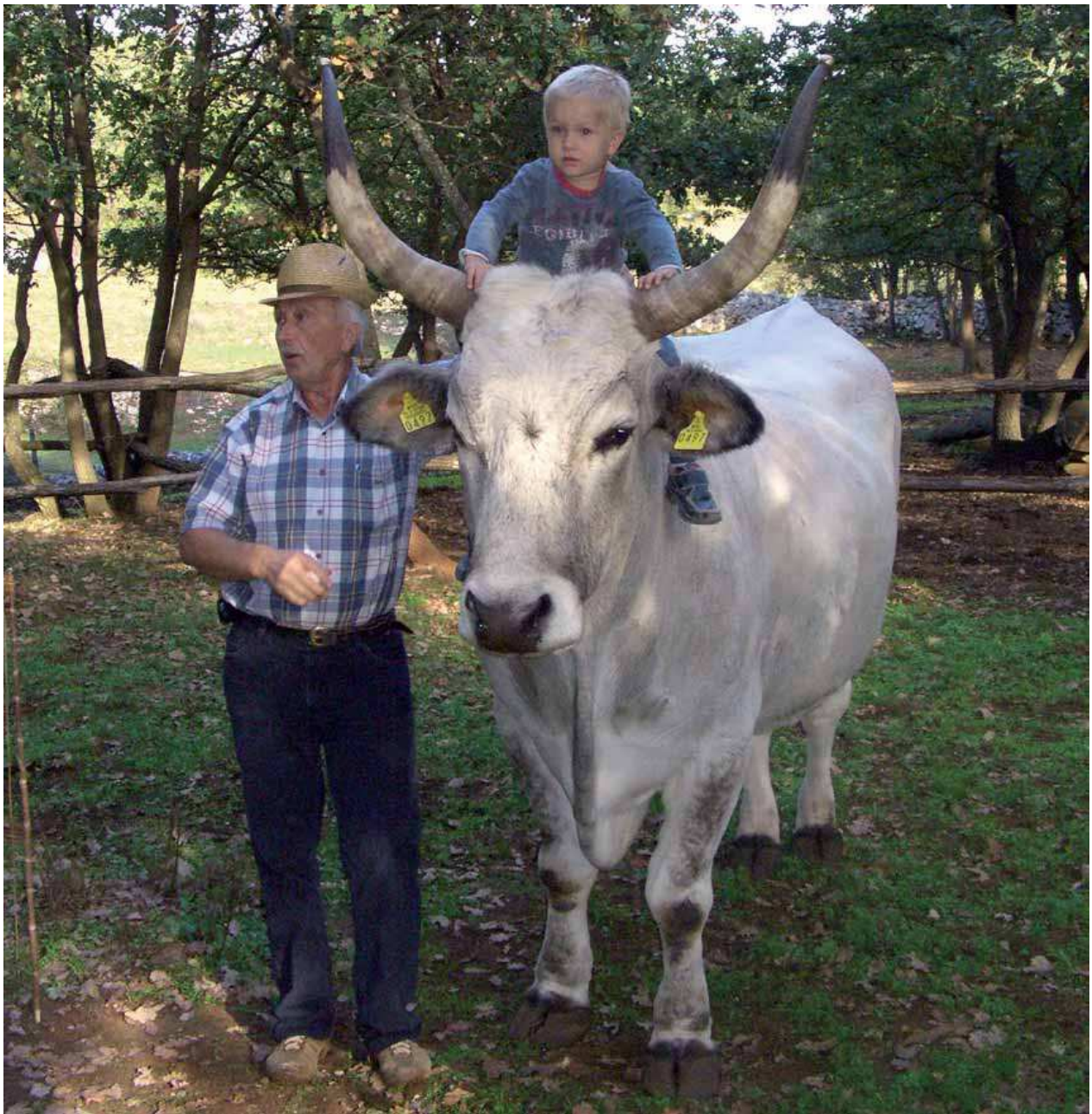
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Events

Everyone's mad about the Istrian!

by Roberta Guarcini
ANABIC Director



Events

This past 25 and 26 October, the Istrian cattle breed was the focus of the attention of an Italian delegation that had arrived in Istria specifically for that purpose. The group included, for ANABIC, Director Roberta Guarcini, together with technicians Andrea Quaglia (Herdbook Office) and Matteo Ridolfi, experts coordinator. Welcome and authoritative company on this interesting cattle-breeding tour was provided by a qualified delegation from the region of Basilicata, made up of Roberto Falotico, Agriculture Commissioner of the Region of Basilicata, Francesco Pesce, General Manager of the Agriculture Inspections Department of the Region of Basilicata, Rocco Battaglino, President of the Provincial Breeders' Association of Potenza, Augusto Calbi, Director of the Provincial Breeders' Association of Potenza and Matera, Rocco Giorgio, of the Regional Office of Livestock Productions and expert on the Podolica breed, and Donato Bochicchio, an aide of Mr. Falotico. The purpose of the visit was to gain more in-depth knowledge on the Istrian cattle breed, particularly similar to our Rustic breeds, as well as to cement the institutional relations already existing with the ANABIC and those of the Agricultural and Livestock system of Istria with the corresponding regional organizations of Basilicata. The enchanting scenery offered by Istria in its autumn atmosphere offered the ideal setting for the meetings and visits to farms. An important meeting was held on 25 October in Tinjan, a pleasant little town that was hosting, during that period, the International Ham Fair. Receiving the Italian delegates were the top authorities of the Istrian livestock system, including Ivan Jakovcic, President of the Region of Istria, Milan Antolovic, Agriculture Commissioner of the Region of Istria,

Graziano Prekalj, Director of the Rural Development Agency of Istria (AZRRI), Aldo Stifanic, President of the Istrian Cattle Breeders' Association (SUIG), Gordan Subara, executive of the Economic Programmes of the Istrian Rural Development Agency, Prof. Ante Ivankovic, Director of the Animal Husbandry Institute – Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, Goran Divjak, executive of the Regional Service – Croatian Livestock Centre, Ivanka Bervida, of the Croatian Institute of Agriculture Consultancy, Melena Ramljak, Faculty of Agriculture Assistant at the University of Zagreb, and Alfredo Jedrejic, Secretary of the SUIG, the Istrian Cattle Breeders' Association. After the standard presentations and greetings by the Authorities of the two countries, the representatives of the various Croatian organizations outlined the technical and operational policies of the activities of their respective spheres of action, emphasizing the utmost willingness to cooperate on the planning of common development programmes for the agricultural and livestock sector. Of particular interest was the presentation by Mr. Graziano Prekalj who, after speaking briefly of the origins and history of the Istrian breed, described the development lines of its selection and enhancement, with regard to which the selection and traceability model used in Italy by the ANABIC is considered a point of reference. Also particularly interesting and enjoyable was the greeting by Aldo Stifanic, President of the Istrian Cattle Breeders' Association, who, speaking in Venetian-Istrian dialect, after telling of the difficult times experienced by the breed in the past (which greatly reduced their numbers), described the work done over the past decade, characterized by the first signs of recovery and with significant

Events

efforts made to qualify the breed's meat. After having been on the threshold of extinction 15 years ago, with only 150 head of cattle remaining, the breed reversed the trend, tripling its numbers and becoming the focus of growing interest, also backed by a consolidated tradition that sees it strongly bound to the territory. At the end of his talk, Mr. Stifanic made a gift to Mr. Falotico of a small model of the Istrian Ox and an interesting book on the history of the breed. For his part, Mr. Falotico gave to those present a copy of the book of photographs "La Podolica" by Rocco Giorgio, published by the Region of Basilicata. The next person to speak, ANABIC Director Roberta Guarcini, described the ANABIC's institutional role and activity, dwelling on the restructuring of the genetic centre and the most important initiatives undertaken to support selection, first and foremost of which the DNA Bank. The occasion could not have been a more propitious one for mentioning and promoting the 1st International Congress of Breeds of the Podolica Strain, planned to take place in Matera in June 2009, which will feature our breeds as protagonists together with their European "cousins" sharing the same origin, and with regard to which preliminary contacts are under way with the operators of the various countries. This point was discussed by Agriculture Commissioner of the Region of Basilicata, Mr. Falotico, who stressed the millenary

history of Matera and its "Sassi", inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site and a location used as a set for a number of major films. During his presentation, Mr. Falotico underscored the environmental similarities between the agricultural worlds of Basilicata and Istria, confirming – also in view of the upcoming entrance of Croatia into the European Union – the support of his organization in terms of both political-organizational experience and the development of livestock-based initiatives of common interest.



Istria - Italian delegation at the meeting about Istrian cattle breed

VISITS TO BREEDING FARMS

Alongside the institutional part, the trip to Istria also featured visits to several breeding farms, where our delegation was received with the cordiality and friendliness of the owners. The Istrian breed is very similar to our cattle of the Podolica strain, and shares many common traits with the Pugliese del Veneto breed, which was common up until the 1960s in various provinces of the Veneto region with a population of over 100,000 animals, but today is unfortunately extinct. The Istrian is large in size, with a grey coat, lyre-shaped horns, and body proportions that make it similar to both the Podolica, in length, structure, and distribution of the trunk

Events

volumes, and to the Romagnola, in the bone structure quality, strength of the forequarters, and rump diameters. Of particular interest in this animal is also the maternal aptitude, evident in both the volume of the udder and the correct conformation of the teats, and in the strong growth rates of suckling calves. The calves are born tawny in colour and weigh around 35 kg at birth, and calvings are generally spontaneous. The animals are summer-grazed with the aid of simple shelters and their feed ration is supplemented during the winter season. Used for centuries as an animal engine for working in the fields, the breed developed particularly correct limbs with well shaped, exceptionally strong feet. The muscle covering is uniform and determines yields which, in bullocks, are just under 60%. Cows' weights vary between 650 and 750 kg, while adult bulls can reach and exceed 1,100 kg. There is an interesting habit of breeders to resort to castration of bulls at three years of age to use them as work oxen, for which there is still a strongly rooted tradition. The recourse to the farm bull is common to all farms, and there are 4 main paternal lines which currently survive in the breed. With regard to this, both the Istrian Cattle Breeders' Association (SUIG) and the Istrian Rural Development Agency are drawing and distributing the seminal material of young bulls to contribute to maintaining genetic variability in the breed. The enhancement of the meat productions and the traceability of the whole production chain are the elements currently being worked on by the Istrian Breed "system". The passion of the breeders and the technical support of their organizations seem to point to a positive evolution for this bovine of interesting potential. Our tour of the breeding farms also left time for a short

visit to Parendo and Rovigno, towns of strong tourist attraction which reflect, in their architecture, the strong cultural impact of the Republic of Venice on the territory of Istria.

DEVELOPMENTS

The closeness between the characteristics of the Istrian bovine and those of the Italian beef breeds of the Podolica strain was the underlying reason for the interest of the Rural Development Agency of Istria (AZRRI) in them, and in particular in the Podolica breed, very similar to the Istrian not only in morphology but also in its rusticity, frugality, and excellent maternal traits. The selection scheme used by the ANABIC was judged to be that most in keeping with the breed's necessities compared to those used in Europe for other beef breeds, and the in-depth studies being made over time through the reciprocal exchanges of a technical nature are bound to produce important results. The upcoming International Congress of Matera, as was the case for that of Gubbio, will lay the foundations for an even closer cooperation not only between our two countries, but also with all those who preserve the genetics of the grey breeds of the Podolica strain. Alongside the Istrian and Hungarian Grey breeds, realities with which contacts have already taken place, there are also other breeds, such as the Turkish Grey, the Ukrainian Grey, and Bulgarian Iskar, and others still. The ANABIC intends to look into the possibility of interacting with these ethnic groups and their respective livestock systems, broadening its horizons and offering its experience and interest in cooperation.

To wind up the comments on our adventure in Istria, we wish to express some special thanks, first of all to Mr.

Events

Graziano PreKalj, AZRRI Director, his aide Mr. Gordan Subara, whom we had already met in Italy and who was our kind tutor throughout the entire visit, and Aldo Stifanic, the passionate President of the Istrian Cattle Breeders' Association, who made us feel "at home" with his fluent Venetian dialect, and through whom we also wish to express our appreciation to the Istrian breeders. Lastly, our sincere thanks also go to the authoritative Basilicata group of our delegation, who had regional Agriculture Commissioner Roberto Falotico as their most authoritative member, and with whom the already strong cooperation relations, through which we work to further the

Podolica breed, were further intensified and enriched by new and ambitious programmes for the future.



Istrian cattle grazing in the pasture

Events

The Chianina conquers Savigliano

by Chiara Matteucci
ANABIC Shows Office

Success and praise for the 4th edition of “Madama la Piemontesa”, held this past 26-28 September in Savigliano, a charming and hospitable town in the province of Cuneo.

The numerous visitors crowding the key spots of the event decreed its unstoppable success.

The event, which has now reached its fourth year, takes its name from a steak of tender Piemontese beef which, having become one of the main dishes of the regional gastronomy, decided to “challenge”, with a sort of competition, other major cattle breeds: the Charolais, the Chianina and, for the first time, the Angus also. The only concession granted: that of being escorted by a team of breeders, butchers, and chefs.

As Luigi Ponsi, President of the Ente Manifestazioni (Events Authority) of Savigliano, confirmed, the 2008 edition “intended to highlight the sections of the animal which are little known and often underrated, the so-called ‘poor’ cuts, and all bovine by-products which, however, can be used to create dishes rich with personality, tastiness, and flavour.”

The idea was to reconstruct the quality of the meat from the field to the butcher’s counter, in a very simple way; for each breed there was a stand, in our case called “Casa Chianina”, positioned in one of the four corners of the majestic Piazza del Popolo. Our breed, just like for the previous edition, was represented by a group of 7 animals (1 bull calf, 1 heifer, 3



Events

cows, and 2 heifer calves) from Gian Michele Graziani's La Viola farm in



Ravenna.

Health and sanitary problems connected with the moving of the animals from Umbria and Tuscany were not able to block the "landing" of the Chianina which – thanks to the helpfulness and professionalism of the Graziani farm which, in addition to being a leader in the Romagnola cattle world, for a couple of years now has been obtaining great results with the Chianina also – enabled us to be present in full regalia at the event.

Inside "Casa Chianina", in addition to the cattle, the protagonists par excellence, and an entire photography show devoted to it, there was a detailed informational route comprising the traits of the animals, diet, types of breeding systems, and product certification.

Also part of the "Casa Chianina" was a big attraction, the Chianina Beef Shop, run by the Ricci butcher's shop in Trequanda (Siena) and sponsored by the Consortium for the Defence of the "Central Apennine White Bullock".

Particular mention goes to the stand of the Typical Breeding Regions which, in

our case, was entrusted to the Region of Umbria, where award-winning farms exhibited their gems, such as La Cantina dei Colli Perugini of Marsciano with its Colle Regio wine, Grifo Latte's pecorino and caciotta cheeses from Norcia and Colfiorito, the Montefalco Rosso and Sagrantino wines of Montefalco by the Farchioni Group of Trevi, and the ever-present Il Casolare extra virgin olive oil, also by the Farchioni Group, a fundamental partner in exalting the flavour meat dishes.

Over the three days there were also the "Great Challenges",

where counters, stoves, and grills aided butchers in preparing the best cuts and chefs who, in an atmosphere of healthy and friendly competition, demonstrated the live preparation of typical dishes.

The sole judges, with forks in hand and "whetted" palate, were the public.

The novelty this year was the establishment of the First International Cooking Competition, entirely devoted to the preparation of meat dishes.

For the second time, Massimo Infarinati, chef and teacher at the *Università dei Sapori*, was given the task and honour of making known and promoting Chianina beef.

As during the previous edition, Massimo lived up to expectations, managing not only to conquer and delight both insiders and common folk, but also achieving an unexpected "sold out" at the Chianina Beef Shop.

The stands of the four breeds were always crowded with visitors, as were the tasting spots: at least 3,000 tickets were distributed for meat tastings in just three days.

Events

But Madama was also so much more: from visits to farms, to teaching workshops for both youngsters and adults, to cooking lessons, to an area reserved for dairy products made using the milk of Piemontese cows, and even an artisans' village. For three days the historic centre of Savigliano was transformed into an agro-food fair, but also a cultural occasion, since buildings and museums remained open especially



“CASA CHIANINA” Anabic’s corner at the Piazza del Popolo in Savigliano

for the tourists, who could take advantage of guided tours and poetic settings. The final results of the event were more than positive, and even the foreign delegations were struck by the extraordinary flow of visitors it attracted, and by the sensation it caused at the international level also.

In conclusion, we would like to thank all those who enabled us to participate, from the Ente Manifestazioni of Savigliano, to “Deik Cultura e Turismo”, to the Town of Savigliano, organizers and promoters of

“Madama la Piemontesa”, to the Mayor of the town of Marsciano Gianfranco Chiacchieroni, to Grifo Latte President Carlo Catanossi, for his support and contribution, and to the Tourist Promotion

Agency of the Region of Umbria. An arrivederci also to our “rivals”, the Piemontese, Charolais, and Angus breeds, which we were able to get to know better.

Considerations on calving ease

by Matteo Ridolfi
Morphological Evaluations Office

Taurus issue no. 4/2007 featured a preliminary study by Fiorella Sbarra of the ANABIC Genetic Evaluation Office on the calving ease of the five Italian beef breeds, based on data transmitted by breeders to their Provincial Breeders' Associations. The purpose of the study was to verify the variability of the trait in the populations of the five breeds. What was studied was the direct effect of the trait, broken down, according to the Italian Breeders' Association classification, into the following classes:

- a) spontaneous or unassisted calving;
- b) calving with the assistance of one person;
- c) caesarian section
- d) calving with the assistance of 2 or more persons or mechanical means.

The result of the study showed an overwhelming preponderance of classes A and B (which together account for about 97% of all calvings), with classes C and D documented only sporadically. The fact that our breeds are easily managed in this respect is reassuring; in particular, it is a fact that for the two "rustic" breeds, Maremmana and Podolica, calving usually takes place without any help whatsoever, whereas for the specialized breeds it is slightly more probable that the cows will receive assistance for their

calving. Selecting the breeds by muscle development and weight gain, both traits which are negatively correlated with calving ease, it is also logical to expect calves that are heavier and more muscular at birth, and that calving ease may evolve over time. We are also seeing a clear evolution of the type of breeding system used with our breeds, with a definite trend toward loose housing and/or toward the seasonal summer grazing system, an aspect that selection absolutely must support in order to facilitate breeders in the management of their herds. There are numerous variables that influence the recording of calving ease, first of which is the subjectivity of whoever provides the data and whoever records it, without overlooking the "memory" of the supplier of the information, or the breeder's instinctive reluctance to talk about problems in managing his herd. The fact remains that the information on calving ease is some of the most useful information a breeder can provide, and therefore it is necessary to recommend the utmost attention and precision, in order to be able to advise on the use of the bulls, in particular the younger ones, in the most appropriate way. In the breed expert circles, "word of mouth" rules, and the need to provide information means that even without the "official seal of approval", the impressions concerning

Events

young bulls circulate rapidly, as soon as some expert has had the chance to see the first products. Knowing whether or not a bull can be used on heifers is, in fact, a frequent necessity for breeders who resort to AI.

It should also be stressed that for breeds such as ours, in which the only source of income produced by the cow is the calf, there is a widespread sensitivity among breeders regarding these problems.

A COMPLEX TRAIT

The foetus does not develop solely as a result of the genetic makeup inherited from each of its two parents, but is also largely influenced by the environment. The environment with which the embryo first, and then the foetus, has deep interactions, is that of the mother's uterus. Calving ease is, in fact, strongly influenced by these interactions. The extension of the internal surface of the uterus, on which the cotyledons of the placenta are implanted, is considerably greater in mature cows than in first-calvers, and is an important environmental variable. The uterine horn in which the pregnancy takes place may also influence the dimensions of the foetus. For example, a pregnancy in the left uterine horn may feel the effects of the compression against the pregnant uterus from the rumen. The efficiency of the complex hormonal balance that develops during the pregnancy between the mother and the foetus is another element of fundamental importance, and may influence, for example, the length of the gestation. The cow's state of nutrition is another important parameter that can affect the size of the foetus. Another important parameter that can influence the course of the pregnancy and the calving is the mother's state of health.

Other factors that also influence the dimensions of the foetus are gender and twin pregnancies, which occur in our breeds with a percentage ranging from 3% to 5%. The muscle and skeletal development of the foetus itself, its transverse diameters, and its presentation at the moment of birth also have an influence on the course of the calving itself, for which other factors of particular importance are the individual sensitivity to oxytocin and the contractile strength of the uterine wall, the transverse diameters between the rear osseous tuberosities of the rump, the capacity of the sacro-ischiatic ligaments to loosen, the muscle tone, and the cow's tone. This excursus renders the idea of how vast the range of environmental factors is, and to these must be added the aspects of a genetic nature. The latter must take into account the fact that the genetic makeup of the foetus and that of the mother are different from one another. The "calving difficulty" trait may thus be examined with regard to two fundamental aspects: the calf's ease of birth (direct genetic effect) and the mothers' calving ease (maternal or indirect effect). These two effects are, however, negatively correlated to one another to a significant extent, and this means that the selection for one of the two aspects negatively affects the other. A sire that produces small-sized calves and with a high calving ease due to their reduced pelvic diameters will tend to produce daughters with greater calving difficulties because of their narrow pelvis.

HOW TO MANAGE THE TRAIT

The analysis of the numerous aspects that influence the trait makes it clear how the importance of environmental effects decidedly overwhelms genetic ones. The

Events

calving difficulty trait thus falls under those of low inheritability, with regard to which it will be difficult, because of the low accuracy of the indices, to offer breeders a guarantee against the occurrence of calvings with calves of dimensions higher than expected. The data concerning the ease of birth of the progeny of a sire are only an approximate indication aiming to reduce the occurrence of problems. All breeders want their heifers to go through their first calving without too many risks, but to exasperate the concept with the repeated use of “easy” bulls ends up becoming, with time, an obligatory choice to guarantee against problematic calvings of cows with increasingly narrow pelvises. It is common and justified to abstain from using calving-difficult bulls on heifers, on which there is also a tendency to avoid the use of young bulls, on which there is not much information. The problem might be solved by fertilizing the heifers with calving-easy bulls, and not keeping the females obtained for replacement servicing. However, considering that the best genetics of a breeding farm involved in selection activities is represented by the young cattle, we might wonder if it would be worth the price. A sensible solution might be that of making an initial selection of the heifers, culling the less-developed ones and those with small rear diameters of the rump, inseminating those held for replacement servicing with bulls of average calving ease. Such a choice is based on the fact that usually, because of the smaller uterus dimensions compared to more mature cows, heifers give birth to calves of smaller size. The females deriving from these matings, once impregnated, would then be able to go through their first calving without too many problems, with the further benefit of

not excessively penalizing the genetic progress of the breeding farm. However, the crucial point of not providing prompt information with regard to the calving ease of young bulls on heifers remains. The suggestion is thus to use some of the heifers for young bulls, carefully choosing the more developed ones and those with the more open rumps. On the other hand, on more mature cows, bulls can be used while paying less attention to the type of calving, also in order to avoid setting too many limitations for the genetic improvement that may be attained.

As we have seen, there are numerous managerial aspects that influence the trait, primarily the nutrition level of the rations for the pregnant mothers during the period leading up to the calving. In fact, cows that are too fat are more prone to dystocia, not only because of the larger size of the foetus, but also due to the deposit of fat in their birth canals. It is necessary to keep the cow from increasing her weight too much during the period between a weaning and the next calving. One case where weight gain becomes necessary is when the cow arrives at the end of the suckling period too thin; it is, however, always desirable for the weight gain and recovery of body condition to take place during the last part of the lactation period and not during the dry period.

Another important element is the possibility for the pregnant cow to move about freely, since exercise is good preparation for an easy calving. Lastly, it is useful to have on the farm a clean calving room with abundant litter, in which to house the cows at the end of their pregnancies, so they can calve in total tranquillity, as they would in nature.

Events

Meeting about theriogenology

by Maurizio Monaci

DVM, PhD, Professor of Reproduction of the Department of Pathology, Diagnostic and Veterinary Clinics, University of Perugia - School of Veterinary Medicine

Peter Chenoweth, Professor of Veterinary Reproduction at Charles Sturt University (Wagga Wagga) was the featured speaker at a Master of Dairy Production Medicine (MDPM) symposium conducted by the University of Perugia, October 30th and 31st 2008. This meeting was sponsored by The University of Perugia, The Master Dairy Production Medicine Program, The National Veterinary Foundation of Italy (FNOVI) and National Association of Italian Beef Cattle Breeders (ANABIC)/Ministry for Agricultural Policy. It was attended by veterinarians undertaking the MDPM program, theriogenologists (both veterinary practitioners and academics), veterinary practitioners, and representatives of the national breed associations and artificial insemination centers and was coordinated by Professor Maurizio Monaci, DVM, PhD, Professor of Reproduction of the Department of Pathology, Diagnostic and Veterinary Clinics, University of Perugia - School of Veterinary Medicine, v.S.Costanzo 4 - 06126 Perugia – Italy. Dr Sylla Lakamy, of the same department, provided valuable logistical support.



Professor Chenoweth and Dr Sylla Lakamy inspecting a bull at ANABIC

Events

Professor Chenoweth gave the following presentations at the meeting:

1. Bull Fertility Testing
2. Common and Uncommon Problems in Breeding Bulls.
3. Bull Semen: Selected Topics.
4. Fertility: The Bottom Line.

In addition, he visited the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Perugia. Here, he was most impressed by the quality of the teaching facilities as well as by both the academic staff and students that he had the opportunity to meet.

Professor Chenoweth also inspected the ANABIC Central Genetics Center where he was welcomed by the director, Dr Roberta Guarcini and briefed on the selection criteria used for the different

breeds (Marchigiana, Chianina and Romagnola) by Dr Matteo Ridolfi. Here, he had the opportunity to observe the future sires of the iconic Italian breeds and to be impressed by the quality of the animals. He commented that “these animals represent an invaluable genetic resource, not only for Italy but also for the rest of the world”.

These meeting and visits provided a unique opportunity to establish collaborative networks between academics and industry in Australia and Italy, based upon mutual problems and complementary expertise. Professor Chenoweth was very appreciative of the opportunity to attend the meeting which he found to be both stimulating and informative.

News from the World

From England: Edward Towers' farm

| by Edward Towers



when my father was one of a group who imported them from Italy. Our own Chianina bull died in 2005 and we were unable to find another one in the UK so began to use AI. The semen available in the UK was from the original importation in the 1970s. When we had used all the semen we could source in the UK we decided to contact Anabic to try to import semen direct from Italy ourselves. The semen arrived in April 2008 and we are expecting the first calves to lero early in 2009. The auction of stock

Our farm is a 260 hectare dairy farm in the North West of England, near to the English Lake District. We milk 330 cows. The majority of these are Holstein, but we also milk about 80 pure bred Swedish Red which we imported from Sweden as in-calf heifers. We rear most of our own dairy replacements but some animals are served to Chianina. We find although the gestation period is slightly longer we have no difficulties with calving. The calves are very strong and alert when new born. These cross bred cattle are kept extensively until they are 18 to 24 months when they are sold for finishing. The price achieved is good. Recently heifers aged 20/22 months averaged 900 Euros and bullocks of the same age averaged 1000 Euros. Our interest in Chianina began in the 1970s

calves, a popular opportunity for breeders to meet and discuss the current situation was held on Monday.

Despite the efforts of the auctioneer, the auction left everyone with a bitter taste in



News from the World

their mouth given the poor sales recorded.

Apart from the financial aspect, the show continued successfully with the popular judging competition between agricultural institutes, awarding of the “Mario Casini” and “Silvio Datti” trophies and the prize to the best animal in show, with a trophy awarded by the National Association of Chianina Cities. Once again this year,

restaurateurs from the Municipalities of Badia Tedalda and Sestino offered participants a food festival called “... live on Chianina...” with menus featuring exclusively PGI Chianina meat. Yet another opportunity to appreciate the flavour and quality of this excellent meat: after all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating!



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