

Aigar Suurmaa represented Estonia at the World Hereford Conference and it was the first time Estonia had had a representative at the conference. As the official language for the World Hereford Council is English Aigar translated his report to English and read it for the audience. Aigar says his English is very limited but everyone appreciated his report and he received great applause for his effort.

## **About Hereford Breeding in Estonia**

**Aigar Suurmaa –**

**Head of the Hereford Section of the Estonian Beef Cattle Breeders Society**

I am happy to visit this World Hereford Conference, at which Estonia will take place for the first time. From 1990 we participated in all European Hereford Conferences, seven in all.

Estonia is located in east part of Europe and south of Finland. The population of Estonia is about 1,4 million and the area is 45 000 square kilometres. There is a suitable climate for bovine husbandry: enough warmth and rainfall, and the winter period lasts about six months. Estonia is famous for milk and pork production.

From 1940 to 1991 Estonia was occupied and that is known as Soviet time. Cattle-breeding developed very slowly because contacts with foreign states almost failed.

In 1978 54 Hereford heifers were purchased from different parts of Soviet Union. At first the Herefords` breeding was difficult as we had not any experience. There were raised numerically a lot of cattle in state and collective farms of Soviet Estonia and large amounts of milk and meat products were realised in Russia. Herefords by her restful character won the sympathy of our cattle breeders.

The number of Herefords`increased, but breeding material was not very precious because of purchasing this only from Soviet Union. Daily gain of heifers´ was 400 g and during this time it was a good result. There was established Estonian Hereford Breeders Club to join Hereford breeders. The object of this step was to popularise beef cattle breeding, to organise training courses and excursions. Soon enough to our beef cattle breeders, there opened up a chance to familiarise with Finland beef cattle breeding. At Soviet time there was a regular ship connection between Estonia and Finland.

After reindpendence of Estonia there was 2000 Herefords. After disposal of state and collective farms the number of Herefords decreased to 700. The beef cattle were raised only by enthusiasts. There was not any support and beef cattle breeding was at a loss.

When the Estonian Beef Cattle Breeders Society was established, the situation in beef cattle breeding improved. Society promoted this branch of cattle husbandry, started to organise training courses and to stand for better conditions of beef cattle breeders. There imposed state supports and the beef cattle breeders got certain benefit already.

Now there is raised 11 breeds of beef cattle and the interest to other beef cattle breeds is enlarging. The number of beef cattle had increased; now there is 25 000 and about these Herefords nearly 7 000. Most spreaded are Hereford, Aberdeen-Angus and Limousin, which is 80% of the Estonian beef cattle.

When 15 years ago the aim of beef cattle breeders´ was to increase the number of beef cattle (also crossing with dairy cattle) then now the aim is selective breeding.

There was purchased more than 800 beef heifers and bulls from abroad (more than 200 Herefords). Daily gain of young beef cattle is 1000 g as well as one kilogramme. Estonian Beef Cattle Breeders Society organised excursions to Finland and Ireland, and with small breeders´ groups familiarised with beef cattle breeding in Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and



France. In the last two years we have organised the beef cattle auctions and year by year the beef cattle shows.

We will believe that in 2013 the number of beef cattle is 50 000, because there is no problem with pastures.