

Mr. Chairman Ladies and Gentlemen

When I last spoke to a Hereford gathering about Irish Hereford Prime at the European Hereford Conference in Ireland in 2005, I said that it had expanded slowly but surely. Similar progress has been made since then as is evident from the weekly kill figures. In the week gone by, 225 cattle were processed and but for a scarcity of supply because cattle are only starting to become fit from summer grass, more would have gone through the system.

Some background information about Irish Hereford prime might be appropriate. It was started by the Irish Hereford Breed Society in 1998 to market quality assured Hereford Prime Beef. The company currently has 11 directors, both pedigree breeders and commercial producers. The Irish Hereford Breed Society retains some influence by having the right to nominate members of the board. Shortly after its inception all members of The Hereford Society became members of Irish Hereford Prime contributing 120 EUR each to provide funds for the company. Life membership still costs 127 EUR and there are now almost 800 members. The company receives 6,35 EUR which is deducted from the price of each animal. A procurement officer is employed to ensure a steady supply of suitable cattle.

Cattle suitable for the scheme are at least 50% Hereford,
Under 30 months
Grading 3,4L or 4H on fat
U,R or O on conformation.

Bonus of 14 cent/kilo is paid on cattle slaughtered January to June and 11 cents/kilo is paid from July to October.

Weights which qualify 230-350 kilos for steers and 230-320 for Heifers.

The first customer for Irish Hereford Prime Beef was in 1998 was Jean Denaux, a Paris meat wholesaler who supplies top of the range French Restaurants. Then in 2000 Irish Hereford Prime began selling on the Irish market. This beef was sold to butchers and restaurants. This trade continues with distribution by Pallas Foods, a very large food distribution company. The Champion Supermarket group in Belgium was our next outlet with supplies also going to Otto Gourmet in Germany for the high-class restaurant trade. The highest standards are employed in processing by Anglo Irish Beef Processors who now slaughter cattle for Hereford Prime at 3 plants. Since late 2007 AIBP slaughter for the Modelo Supermarket in Portugal. This Company has 30% of retail market share in Portugal. They have adopted a tiered approach to catering for their customers with different ranges of food from a Cheap and Cheerful to a Premium/Select range. Hereford Prime naturally fits into the Premium/Select category. Feedback has been most encouraging with demand increasing all the time and a national TV advertising campaign is about to start to raise awareness of the product.

At the European Hereford Conference, I said that one of our chief aims was to have Irish Hereford Prime on supermarket shelves in Ireland. I am very glad to say that that this has been achieved. One of the top Irish Supermarket chains "Superquinn" launched a Super Quality range of foods in October 2007 and Dry-aged Irish Hereford Prime was their choice as Super Quality Beef. Early this year, this product won the Irish Food Writers Guild Award. This is a very prestigious award and is a testimony to the quality of the product and the standards employed in its production.

Alltech Ireland, a company producing silage and feed additives have been a major partner for Hereford Prime along with AIBP and Pallas Foods. They have helped enormously in the production of publicity material and in sponsoring Hereford Prime at farming events. More recently Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board have been of great assistance in the production of a new brochure. Without our partners, it would be impossible to function. The steady progress from 30 cattle per week to the present 250 has not been easy. There have been lots of problems along the way but the numbers killed are a barometer of our progress. We hope that this will continue and the steady expansion will lead to a better demand for Hereford bulls. This, after was one of the chief ambitions at the foundation of the company.