

Food industry has to achieve production efficiencies

RECALLING the Balmoral show brings with it all that is positive about our industry almost in a picture postcard sort of way. However the reality is that omelettes aren't made without breaking eggs was well and truly demonstrated in a BBC 3 programme broadcast this week; Blood, Sweat and Takeaways. At the risk of turning this column into a television review article, it merits a review because it demonstrates a very different view of the food industry.

This is a kind of reality TV show following a group of young Britons, all fond of cheap processed food on a journey to Asia to find out more about its production. This week's episode focused on their experience in a tuna factory and fishing boat in Indonesia. To gain an appreciation of what it was like producing the cheap food they all enjoyed the group were to live and work alongside the native

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

PHELMIM O'NEILL



factory workers and that's when it became interesting for those of us involved in the industry here. The initial shock to the system was the living standards of the native workers with whom the participants had to live. Houses were comparable to what we would describe as shabby garden sheds and while the local population appeared to have enough to eat and were adequately clothed, the poverty of their existence was all too evident.

Living in this environment was quite an initial shock but there was more to come. Arrival at the factory

was the next shock. Whether or not it was the presence of BBC cameras there was no denying the production standards of the factory were extremely impressive. Attention to hygiene didn't just involve wearing the proper clothing; everyone had a personal inspection with finger nails in particular attracting attention and in many cases a pair of scissors. Needless to say that visiting participants struggled with working on a tuna fish line and catching the fish at sea in a boat in which sleeping conditions were so primitive that if we kept

cattle in such tight confines we would have a serious welfare issue on our hands. The final twist for the viewer was still to come. Despite operating in a very impressive looking factory which was such a contrast to the shanty town buildings occupied by the local population, it was evident that it had little by way of sophisticated processing equipment but an awful lot of people. When the wage rates for a long days work in extremely tough conditions were revealed this mystery was solved. The guest workers earned just £2 for their day's work, so against this background of extremely cheap labour it is little wonder investment in equipment is so low.

The message for our food industry is clear. Firstly it is amazing just how low production costs are in the developing world and how high production standards appear. It is also striking

that while working practices and conditions in clothing factories have captured some attention in the fashion industry there is little comment on the conditions of food production. Above all if we have ambitions in sustaining a local food industry we have to achieve production efficiencies on a scale we haven't yet imagined and there is no room for the level of bureaucratic costs currently carried. When we have done all that we still have a major marketing job on our hands to hold consumer loyalty as we will still be an expensive production region for most foods. Otherwise our food industry may well follow our relatively recent shirt making industry - east.

● Views expressed in this article are those of the author only and do not represent those of any other organisation or association.

RIGHT: James Stewart from Rathfriland receiving his prize from Neill Acheson of Farmrite, Portadown.



Students develop their stock judging skills

BY WILLIAM ARCHBOLD

Livestock Instructor, Grrenmount Campus, CAFRE

STUDENTS from across Northern Ireland recently took part in a dairy stock judging competition as part of their NVQ Level 2 in Livestock Production.

This course, offered by Greenmount Campus, College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (CAFRE), allows

them to work on farm and attend class one day per week. Students on the course must be able to assess dairy cows and during the past year they have received instruction in this traditional skill at local farms in Fermanagh, Down, Antrim and Mid Ulster.

To test how much they had learned and to add a little bit of extra interest, the different groups combined to take part in a stock judging competition on

the farm of William Henderson, an Ayrshire breeder from Tobermore.

Each competitor had to discuss and justify where and why they placed the cows in their selected order.

In a keenly contested final, James Stewart, from Rathfriland, who attends the Banbridge centre, was declared the overall winner. First prize was a Border Fine Arts piece donated by Farmrite, Portadown.



weekly Northern Ireland grain market report

Tuesday 19 May 2009

Market News

The USDA sees world wheat production 25Mt or 4% below last season, with maize production estimated down less than 3Mt. In their first estimates for the '09/10 season, the USDA placed world wheat at 657.7Mt, maize at 785.1Mt, and soyabeans at 241.7Mt, up 29Mt or 14%. The fall in wheat production was mostly in the EU, (down 13Mt), US (-13Mt), and FSU (-11.5Mt), partly offset by increases in Australia, Argentina and Pakistan. Falls in EU, FSU and Chinese maize production are offset by increases in Argentina and Brazil. The bigger soyabean crop comes from boosts in the US, Argentina and Brazil. Overall demand is seen higher, with wheat up 7Mt to 642.8Mt, maize up almost 18Mt to 796.5Mt, and soyabeans up 9Mt to 231.5Mt. The stocks-to-use ratios are now 28% for wheat (up 2%), 16% for maize (down 2%) and 22% for soyabeans (up 3%).

Delivered Prices		Prices on Friday: May 15, 2009		Basis HGCA
As at Thursday	Feed Barley	weekly change	Feed W heat	
Delivered into Belfast	119.50	+2.00	132.50	+6.50

Belfast Imported Prices		Feed Barley		Basis (HGCA)
As at Tuesday	Feed Barley	weekly change	Feed W heat	
EU	116.50	unch	128.00	unch

Proteins	Offered Price	weekly change	Delivery	Basis (HGCA)
Soyameal - FEMUS standard (Hi-pro)	337.00	+13.00	May	Ex-mill Liverpool
	334.00	+10.00	Jun	"
Soyameal - Brazilian (48%)	-	-	-	Ex-store Liverpool
	-	-	-	"

Nearby Futures Prices	Friday 15-May-09	Friday 08-May-09	weekly change
Settlement Prices			
LIFFE Wheat (£/tonne)	118.50	117.50	+1.00
MATIF Wheat (€/tonne)	148.00	150.00	-2.00
MATIF Rapeseed (€/tonne)	318.75	317.75	+1.00

Currency	Friday 15-May-09	Friday 08-May-09	% change
USDollar \$/euro	1.3518	1.3425	+0.0069
Sterling £/EURO	0.8905	0.8907	-0.0002

This report is FREE to levy payers on the HGCA Web site and aims to meet the demands of its users. Please contact HGCA if you have any relevant questions, comments or suggestions.

Crop Marketing Department, HGCA, Caledonia House, 223 Pentonville Road, London N1 9HY.
Tel: 020 7520 3972 Fax: 020 7520 3953 <http://www.hgca.com> Fax-back: 0870 444 0117

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LEFT: Instructor Steven Girvan holding a cow as Daryl Gillespie (Omagh, Co Tyrone) and Robert Kee (Newtownstewart, Co Tyrone) make their assessment.

More money with Durapak slatted rubber

DURAPAK Agri, the Cork-based agri wholesalers, have claimed that their Durapak Slatted Rubber will bring between two and five times more benefits to farmers who install their three piece product over and above their competitors.

According to Seamus O'Callaghan, the company's Managing Director, preliminary

trial data from the Teagasc research facility in Grange, Co Meath has shown that Durapak came out on top in the combined Teagasc studies on slatted rubber for 2006 and 2007.

Teagasc carried out a very extensive trial using 360 beef bullocks and they compared three different makes of slatted rubber with

out-wintering pads and bare concrete slats.

The Durapak mat came out on top and produced animals with an increase in carcass weight at 14 kilo over and above bare concrete slats which is worth about £40-£45 per head of animal (386 kilo carcass weight - 372 kilo = 14kg extra). In addition the Durapak mat (as well as out-win-

tering pads OWP) produced animals who achieved a higher carcass classification worth possibly £5-£10 per head of animal.

What does this mean for farmers? It means that where farmers install the Durapak Slatted Rubber they will be able to make an extra £45-£55 per head of animal.