

The RJA&HS in Africa 2019, a year of progress and spreading the word

In last year's 2018 annual report, I tried to cover many of the operational dynamics around the Rwanda and Malawi programmes, both of which continue, whilst mentioning at least some of the many people involved in their implementation.

For 2019 I will be focusing on two key events that happened in the year, the first being the World Jersey Cattle Bureau annual meetings, which were held in Rwanda in June and the second a visit to Jersey in November, instigated so as to enable us to train and further expose key individuals in Rwanda to the Jersey cow and the benefits she is capable of bringing to smallholder dairy farming throughout East Africa and beyond.

The WJCB had previously planned to hold their meetings in Kenya, though a short visit into Rwanda as a side tour was to be included. For operational reasons a change was made quite late in the day with the decision taken to host the meetings in Rwanda, around two events that were already built into the 3 year, Phase 2 Jersey Inka Nziza programme extension, which commenced in February 2019.

Hosted by the WJCB, with patronage from Rwanda's MINAGRI, the first of these was a Regional Dairy Workshop, where we brought together personnel from numerous dairy focussed NGO organisations across the region, plus Rwandan livestock experts and technicians, with the visiting international WJCB delegates bringing a further important dimension to proceedings.

Held over the week of June 17th to 21st, with numbers peaking at some 140 delegates at the Workshop on Thursday 20th, the week started with a sobering visit to the Rwanda Genocide Memorial, a visit I did not make until my sixth visit to the country but something I now encourage everyone to experience on their first trip to this fascinating country. By recognizing and recording the events of the 1994 genocide so thoroughly, whilst acting as a resting place for over 250,000 victims of the tragic event, it brings home so clearly to anyone visiting Rwanda not just what the country went through but how it has dealt with processes since.

This was followed by a 2hr drive to Ngoma District to visit Zaza Farm. Managed by the USA based organisation SACPP Ltd (www.sacpp.org/about-1), in June they were developing a 30 cow Jersey herd, for both dairy product production and smallholder farmer training. Ngoma is wet marshy land and one of the poorest districts in the country. Send a Cow Rwanda (SACR) now also operate in Ngoma, supporting the development of improved cattle feeding and nutrition, whilst the SACPP Ltd team at Zaza look to be a very logical additional component to our work there.

Tuesday's visit was towards the north of the country and Rulindo District, one of the six districts in which SACR operate the Jersey Inka Nziza programme. The tour group visited SACR beneficiary farmer Jean Damascene Ngendahayo and his family. The Ngendahayo family own a nearly pure Jersey cow and two of her daughters, one of which was, at the time of the visit, a recently born female sired through AI by semen sourced through the project from a Jersey Island bull. Jean Damascene is also looked upon as a banana production entrepreneur, having identified and propagated banana plants that appear to be more drought resistant. There was great interest in our visit, with many local radio stations active in interviewing senior Rwandese, regional and international delegates alike. SACR then laid on a fantastic community event, which allowed many hundreds of people from the surrounding area to come together to show not just how impactful these projects are but how they operate on so many interconnecting levels.

On Wednesday the now full compliment of regional and international delegates visited Songa Research Station, a 390 hectare pastoral farm located south of the capital Kigali, in Nyanza District. It is here that the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) are already trialling different crosses of indigenous and exotic cattle breeds to help identify a more suitable hybrid cow for local dairying conditions. It is also where RAB are rearing the Jersey Island conceived, Rwandan born calves, born from an ongoing embryo transfer programme. Some of the male calves will enter the Masaka AI Centre in Rwanda during early 2020, for semen production. This is an important element in the programme and helps to build resilience, capacity and sustainability into Rwanda's efforts to take greater ownership in re-developing their dairy industry. Later in the week the Rwandan Agriculture Minister, Dr Gerardine Mukashimana, was to announce that it is Rwanda's intention to develop the Songa Research Station as a hub for developing the influence of the Jersey breed and genetics, not just in Rwanda but for the East African region.

Thursday was the day when many of the regional and international visitors were able to present to the collective audience what, how and why the Jersey is being incorporated into their dairy development programmes. With the theme of the workshop being Why Dairy? Why Jersey? There was a total of ten presentations. Four focusing under Why Dairy? on the wider aspects of the importance of dairy in the region, in particular through dairy development programmes, whilst the remaining six presentations focused on the appropriateness of the use of the Jersey breed to facilitate this necessity, whether as a pure breed or in cross-bred form.

The Regional Dairy Workshop also presented an opportunity to officially launch the concept of the African Jersey Forum. Aligned via the WJCB, to both the European and Latin American Jersey Forums, the AJF will create a mechanism through which Jersey breed research and experiences can be shared amongst all those involved in these fields of work, in particular with reference to the specific suitability of the Jersey in tropical farming situations.

With the WJCB international delegates moving on to Kenya on Friday it was an opportunity for RAB to host a regional delegate workshop, specifically to further share and better understand between African countries more of what had been discussed during an exceptionally busy and productive week. Whilst there are countless individuals across many countries to thank for making the June visit to Rwanda such a success and an exceptionally important piece within the evolving Jersey Cow in the Tropics jigsaw, I do need to recognise the assistance of three local RJAHS members, namely Steve Le Feuvre (WJCB President), for entrusting the fledgling Rwanda Jersey Cattle Society to deliver such an event, Derrick Frigot, for his secretarial support skills in the weeks leading up to the event and Philippa Evans-Bevan, for her regional delegate tour guide role.

Later in 2019 the Society hosted four Rwandans in Jersey for a week of training on a number of general cattle and more specific Jersey breed related subjects. Their visit was arranged to coincide with the Jersey International Development Network's (JIDN) presentation at St Helier Town Hall on the wider JOA initiatives around their Dairy for Development Programme.

Whilst RAB representative, Dr Benjamin Nizeyimana, was at the time head of the national cattle database facility we are developing and trialling through the Rwanda project, the other three were, and are, key SACR employees. Mrs Angelique Barongo is country manager for SACR and gave one of three presentations to the 100 or so local people who attended the JIDN meeting. Jersey Inka Nziza programme manager Mr Valens Kanakuze and Mr Eugene Ndayambaje, who is tasked with monitoring the genetic improvement of cattle within the programme, made up the visiting group. In addition, other key players in the JOA funded Africa dairy work attended both the JIDN presentations and a Dairy for Development strategy development meeting, held at the Society headquarters the following day, which concluded with some excellent analysis and potential road-map material.

The other two speakers at the JIDN meeting were myself, who introduced the Society's long-term involvement within Rwanda and, Dr Yinka Opoola of the Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health, which is based at the Roslin Institute within the Edinburgh University campus. Within the Rwanda project we are developing a very basic Dairy Profit Index, aimed at helping both farmers and policy makers choose appropriate genetics for their needs and Yinka is leading that project element, in conjunction with Dr Felicien Shumbusho, RAB's National Livestock Geneticist. This is a first for Africa and if it proves successful in Rwanda then we have aspirations to roll it out in the other two RJAHS led programmes, in Malawi and Ethiopia.

One final person who needs recognition for his ongoing commitment and support in these RJAHS led projects, is Dai Harvey, the Land O'Lakes Dairy Programmes manager who assists us across all projects on a consultancy basis. A 7th generation Zambian farmer presently based in England, Dai's family have farmed Jerseys in Zambia since 1922.

2020 looks to be an exceptionally busy year, with the Ethiopian project launching too, so there will be plenty to report on in next year's report. On behalf of everyone involved I would like to thank Deputy Carolyn Labey, Simon Boas and all at Jersey Overseas Aid for placing their faith and support in these exciting and life changing programmes.

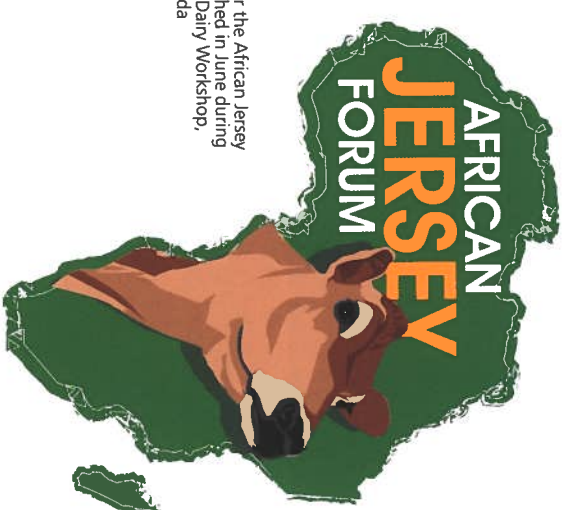
David Hambrook
Head of Dairy for Development Programme RJA&HS



Angelique Ngendahayo and son with their Jersey cow, the family were visited by the WJCB and RDW tour group in June



Rulindo Community event - Send a Cow Rwanda arranged what can only be described as a fantastic event in Rulindo District, where many hundreds of local villagers and farmers came together to show all they had learnt about sustainable farming from the Jersey Inka Nziza project



AJF - Logo for the African Jersey Forum, launched in June during the Regional Dairy Workshop, held in Rwanda



AI training at Songa Research Station



Society President, Rob Perchard, being interviewed by Rwandan and international press during the Ngendahayo family visit