

President's Report
By Drew Conroy

Summer is my favorite time of the year. Seeing my cattle on pasture, moving them to new paddocks and watching the calves grow seems to be the most rewarding aspect of maintaining my small herd. I also have more time to work my young team of Devon steers, which reinforces to me how smart and agile our breed is compared to the dozen or so breeds of cattle I have worked with.

The board of directors decided in June that we would try to get a newsletter out that month. However, our Herdbook was not ready to be released at the time and our semen situation was up in the air. We decided to wait to send a newsletter in August in order to report with more positive news.

As your president, I have had the pleasure of working with a diverse and talented group of directors (6 of them), who are all American Milking Devon breeders from 5 different states, with herds ranging in size from 4 to over 30 animals. We all believe in maintaining genetic diversity within the breed, and the need for breeders to establish their own specific selection criteria, within the general standard provided for the breed.

We will serve the majority of the membership and see that the registry is maintained in an accurate and computerized format using the latest software. We will continue to see that the treasury is solvent. We cannot market your cattle for you, but might be able to assist you in doing that with our new website or general advertisements we will place in a few publications. The board has worked on many issues and has had more new initiatives in one year than has been done in the past 10 years. I would ask you to read the meeting minutes from this year and past years for comparison. The most recent minutes can be found on the website at: <http://www.milkingdevons.org/mtgs.html>

We will serve members as best way we can, but realize we are all also part-time farmers, with family commitments, and all of us have full time jobs away from the farm. There is no paid help, nor do we receive compensation of any kind. We all volunteer our time, money and energy. Finally, I have never served on a board of directors that has been as active as this one. If you have ideas, suggestions, or want to volunteer we could certainly use your input and positive energy, please use the contact information for the directors on our website.

We see the breed as a triple purpose breed that serves many markets, and shows great promise for the future in all of them. However, as a board we do not believe it is in the breed's best interest to select one of the markets such as dairy, meat or draft and convince all of the members to follow that single path.

The main objectives this year have been

1) The update of the herdbook.

The herdbook is now available on-line at our website, and you can find it under the section of breeds. <http://www.milkingdevons.org/breed.html>

It took longer than expected to work out the kinks, but the new computerized system of creating the herdbook will make updates much easier for the directors and allow quick access for those using the internet. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can order a CD of the herdbook from Sue Randall, and have it printed at one of the many stores such as Office Max that can print large documents from CD's.

2) Helping our webmaster Lawrence Gilley with all the updates he has done for us

Many thanks to Lawrence for volunteering his time with this important project! Please check out minutes from the annual meeting if you were unable to attend, and also the highlights of recent director meetings. Check out his work at:

<http://www.milkingdevons.org>

3) Moving our semen to North American Breeders, located in Virginia.

The good news is that we will have faster turnaround on semen orders. However, the bad news is that a large portion of the semen drawn and stored with our previous handler had to be discarded. Even so, I believe it was a wise move to now have an accurate inventory of our semen, an accurate evaluation of the quality of our semen, and a much more professional company handling this service for us. The orders will continue to be done with the semen order form, with payment required up front to our association before the semen will be released. The semen buyer will be responsible for contacting North American Breeders directly about shipment, and payment for that service. Finally, per the recommendations of North American Breeders some bulls with viable semen were recommended to have two straws used at the same time when breeding a cow. In these cases, we will send double the number of straws at the same price, in order to provide you with the best possible chance of getting cows bred.

4) Promotion of the breed

This was a concern at some of our regional meetings, as well as the annual meeting. The board agrees that this something we need to do more of. But again, the primary responsibility for marketing your animals is your own. Attending agricultural fairs and other similar events helps your herd be more visible, and you will find the animals often market themselves. Our new website was a beginning, with a regularly updated for sale section. We have also taken a few ads out in major magazines, and other related publications. It will be important that you maintain your membership, so you will be listed in the directory, when buyers come looking for cattle.

Ramona Huff, AMDCA's Vice President, said she has been thinking about putting together a calendar to sell on the website and at our meetings. The suggested theme was "Kids & Cattle", many members have children and/or grandchildren that they love to see pictured with these fine creatures.

This should be a great promotional tool for the breed. Not to mention that it will bring breeders together. If you have any good quality photos of kids and cattle you would be willing to share, please send them to Ramona Huff.

- 5) **To meet with breeders outside of New England** and see examples of Milking Devon cattle, hear breeder's issues, and help maintain the registry and promote this fine breed of cattle. These activities were reported in the last newsletter.
- 6) **A procedure for registering animals resulting from embryo transfer.** While this might seem straightforward, other breeds have chosen not to allow this, for fear of concentrating the genetics of the breed, resulting in ore inbreeding. We see this as something we will allow, but are exploring the use of DNA samples from each parent as a requirement for registering the embryos, in order to eliminate any mistakes that could result in handling embryos. This could also allow us to begin a DNA database which has been discussed numerous times.
- 7) **Lastly, as voted at the annual meeting, there be a call for Director nominations not later than January 2007.** I am announcing this now, so if there are people interested in becoming a director or someone you might recommend, a short biography could be submitted to the board at any time this year. There will be a nominating committee handling these nominations, as a diverse skill set is required on the board.

The board of directors had monthly phone conferences this year and has tried to divide up many of the responsibilities and follow through on the commitments made during prior meetings or conference calls. We will continue to do our best in this capacity in the coming year.

DNA Analysis of the American Milking Devon

The American Milking Devon Cattle Association was contacted by a group in England to analyze DNA of the American Milking Devon Cattle we have here in this country. While in England, Elaine Shirley met with these people and got things in order to start the process. Here is what they have to say:

We have a PhD student working on a whole lot of comparative DNA work on cattle breeds, but mainly looking at the genetic make up and provenance of the Dexter breed. There has always been a school of thought that says the Dexter breed was derived from a combination of native Kerry types with old Red Devon in Ireland some 200 years ago and the American Milking Devons are by far the nearest thing to that 18th century type of Devon still in existence, the modern Devons here being now a specialist beef breed.

Anything we do with the various breeds will also shed light on the differences/similarities between the various bloodlines within those breeds and so may well be of considerable use to you. What we need is a representative sample across the breed as a whole, just one or two samples from however many different lines/families you can easily manage would be just fine. We can work equally easily from hair or straws of semen (for any bulls on AI) and yes you can send them by post, especially if it is hair samples.

What we need for hair samples would be some hairs, about 20-50, with root follicles which are usually best plucked from around the top of the tail. Each sample needs to be carefully taken of clean, dry hair and put in an individual envelope. The envelope should have the animals individual identification number on it and any other information you might find useful to correlate, like parentage, Herdbook number and so forth. Your members can mail any samples to me at The Cobthorn Trust and the address is at the bottom of this e-mail. We would be pleased to let you have any interesting results if we can show degrees of inbreeding, origin and such things from your samples.

We will very soon have a window of opportunity in terms of laboratory time and facilities to do another batch of samples, so the sooner you can let us have them the better. I am really delighted that you are interested and will make sure you get full feed back from anything we find.

Kind regards, Andrew Sheppy

A.J.Sheppy FLS, Director, The Cobthorn Trust, (www.cobthorn.org)
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If you have any questions regarding this procedure, please feel free to call any of the Directors for clarification.

Guest Speaker - Dr. Mary Zanoni, "Farm for Life"

For those of you who could not make it to the meeting or had to leave early, our guest speaker was Dr. Mary Zanoni of Farm for Life and the focus of her discussion was the "National Animal Identification System." She has published many articles regarding the NAIS and her opposition to it, her presentation was informative but due to time constraints was cut short. I would like to make a few suggestions how livestock owners can get the facts and make their own determination whether this program is right for them. It is still in the voluntary stages of the "Premises ID" phase. Originally, this stage was to be mandatory in July 2006 but the timeline currently remains open. First go to the USDA website www.usda.gov/nais here you can read about the system and how it reads currently. Back in February this website contained a "draft strategic plan", two weeks ago I was able to view a document entitled "Guide for small scale and non-commercial producers". Neither of these are currently available, in a couple more weeks I am sure that new information will be posted as this system is in a constant state of evolution.

Here are some other sites you may visit www.smallfarmersjournal.com – article by Lynn Miller and <http://NoNAIS.org> - petition site and finally www.libertyark.net – petition site. All of these sites speak of the intrusiveness of this program and the "constitutional violations."

Here is what you can do: Many states are conducting working sessions where you can get involved, in Virginia I spoke with the Animal ID Coordinator with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. We have requested to be on the list invited to participate in these working sessions. Contact your state representative to get involved. The USDA finally has made some concessions and is making efforts to try and make this as feasible as possible to everyone. Personally, I want to be involved in this process as farming is my livelihood and my passion and these heritage animals that I raise are not only my responsibility and my companions but they also help to define who I am.

With kind regards,
Ramona Huff
Vice President, American Milking Devon Cattle Association