

# Canadian Charolais Youth Association Conference

*'The trip of a lifetime for any young Charolais breeder'* are the only words to describe the experience that we had in Canada.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March after the Premier sale in Elphin, there was a competition held for young Irish Charolais enthusiasts with the prize being a week-long trip to Canada in association with the International Charolais Youth Development Programme. There were only two places available for delegates to represent Ireland. The competition was comprised of Stock judging, weights estimating and answering questions in relation to the Charolais breed. Coming out on top was, 1<sup>st</sup> Mark Whelan, from the Premier Charolais Herd in Ballykelly, Borris in Ossory, Co. Laois and in 2<sup>nd</sup> place was Michael Carey from the Chanonstown Charolais Herd in Sionhill, Killucan, Co. Westmeath. The following report was written by both Michael and Mark and it accounts for the week-long trip they had representing Ireland in Canada at the Canadian Charolais Youth Association Conference (CCYA) along with other international delegates.

Firstly, before we begin we would like to thank everyone who wished us well and supported us prior to our trip, especially to the Irish Charolais Cattle Society for allowing us the opportunity to represent Ireland on an international level, which we both were very honoured to undertake.

We arrived in Winnipeg on Monday night 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, after meeting up with the British Charolais representative, George Hollinshead, in Dublin Airport and a lengthy flight followed! We were collected at the Airport in Winnipeg and warmly welcomed by Candace and Helgi By. Candace is the secretary of the International Charolais Council along with being an editor of the Charolais Banner magazine in Canada, Helge is the manager and publisher of Charolais Banner. We stayed in a hotel near the airport for the following two nights as we waited for all the other international delegates to arrive. The other international delegates were from New Zealand, Australia, Estonia, Sweden, Czech Republic and the USA. On the Tuesday, after difficulty adjusting to the time zone differences, it was decided that as a group we would do touristy things around the City of Winnipeg. First stop was the Zoo followed by a trip to food markets, then bowling and finally a visit to the local pizza restaurant.

On Wednesday, after all the International delegates had arrived in Canada, we had an early start in the morning and began a two and half hour road trip to Brandon where the CCYA conference was being held. Upon arrival we were again warmly welcomed by the Canadian breeders and we had a look around the barn at the cattle on show, which was attached right onto the hotel in which we were staying. After checking into our hotel, we were introduced to our herdsman groups. A herdsman group basically consisted of 7-8 young breeders made up of one senior, two or three intermediates, two or three juniors and one pewee. Also, one senior international delegate was assigned to each herdsman group. The herdsman group's duties were to basically take care of 7-8 cattle for the duration of the conference, basically the same duties anyone has when they bring their animals to a show. This meant that every morning the cattle were washed, fed and watered and the stalls had to be kept clean for the duration of the day and each herdsman group were judged on their team work. There was no adult or parent

participation allowed. Once we were settled in we had educational seminars to attend, the first speaker being a vet who covered topics such as vaccinations, correct dosing techniques, calving cows and he also answered questions from young breeders, it was a very informative lecture and one that will be remembered for sure! Following that we had a speaker who covered the topic of leadership and how we can apply that in our life, again a very interesting lecture. Wednesday evening consisted of a steak cook off between all herdsman groups; it was very enjoyable and allowed us to mingle more with our herdsman group. Mark's group proved to be the winner .... Although a steward's enquiry may be needed after a suspicion of bribing judges!

On Thursday we all had an early start at 6 am and had to complete our chores of washing the cattle and drying them and ensuring that they had enough feed and water. Once they were completed, an individual judging competition was held, we were assigned to judge steers, bull calves and heifers and along with judging the animals, we had to give oral reasons to the master judges on our selections. After lunch we competed in a team judging competition, this was where two young Charolais breeders had to go into the show ring on their own and judge each animal and place them as they would be placed in a show, one person acting as the judge and the other person acting as a ring man assisting the judge. It was not compulsory to compete in this competition however we felt the Irish had to show off our skills somehow. Mark was the Judge and Michael was the ring man. Mark held the position well and did a fine job as judge matching all his placings the same as the master judge. We were marked and scored on our presentation in the ring. Once the team judging was over, each herdsman group completed their evening chores with the cattle and we travelled out to the local farm of HTA Charolais where we participated in a Keep and Cull competition. We received a lovely dinner followed by a judging of 4 cow and calf pairs. We were assigned the role of selecting 3 cows to keep and one cow to cull based on their conformation, quality of calf at foot and most importantly their milking ability and udder formation, again we were marked on our judging and reasons for this competition. Also, we got to view the herd of pedigree cows on the farm. HTA run 180 pedigree cows. The cows presented were of very high quality, they were similar to the type cows bred in Ireland due to their large frame and conformation which wasn't common in herds in Canada.

Friday consisted of the same morning chores followed by a showmanship competition and all the internationals were divided into two groups and the top two were selected for an overall international winner. Michael was lucky enough to be selected in the top two of his group however the competition was eventually won by the Australian delegate. Following the showmanship competition, there was a team grooming workshop, this was a competition where all the internationals were paired up and were each given an animal to groom. The judges were very impressed by Mark's bullock that he groomed the Irish way, going against the traditional Canadian style of grooming, he received many compliments for his work along with his Swedish partner. The evening consisted of chores, followed by a visit to an old bull testing facility where we had dinner and viewed a very good display of a cattle dog out working in a field of cattle and a talk was given by the trainer on how he trains and manages his dogs.

Saturday was the finale of CCYA. As usual, we completed our morning chores and had breakfast as we prepared for an exciting final day ahead. The day consisted of a show similar to summer shows in Ireland where each of the young competitors got the opportunity to present their stock for judging. Class structure was almost identical to what we were used to, where age and gender determined an animals class. Being international participants, we had the

opportunity to take a step back and let the owners groom and show their stock while we watched on and learned some of their tricks of the trade. After several hours showing, Judges Carman and Donna Jackson of the High Bluff Stock Farms had selected all their champions with big smiles all round from the young owners. After all the post show excitement had eased off and the evening chores were completed, we made a quick dash to the shower and this time we got ourselves groomed up for the final banquet and awards ceremonies. The awards ceremonies were only for the Canadian youths however each International participant did receive a result for each of the tasks we had completed throughout the duration of the conference along with judges' comments, these were seen to be hugely useful by all and a great vote of confidence to all who done well. The awards ceremony was swiftly followed by a meal and a late night of country music and dancing.

Sunday morning we said our fair wells to CCYA 2018 and the many friends we had made throughout the week and made our way to Hunter Charolais in Roblin, Manitoba along with the other International delegates. The business is solely family run with 180 purebred Charolais, 30 Herefords and 60 commercial cows being bred on the farm. Similar to many other large herds in Canada, Hunters run their own bull sale every spring and at their 7<sup>th</sup> annual sale in 2018, their high selling bull topped at \$8600. 36 of their 45 yearling Charolais bulls averaged \$5,316 with the 7 Hereford bulls on offer all finding homes at an average of \$3,857. It was very interesting to view the stock at Hunters and hear an explanation of the breeding programme they have put in place, how it is working for them and how they deal with shortfalls along with their hopes and aspirations for the future. We then proceeded to travel to High Bluff Stock Farm in Inglis, Manitoba. This enterprise is also solely family run by the Jackson Family. The Jacksons breed 200 Charolais and 60 Simmentals. At their 15<sup>th</sup> annual bull sale in March 2018, they had great success. The sales high selling bull topped at \$37,500 and averaged an impressive \$9,096 which proved to be the third highest averaging bull sale of the year across Canada. We were very impressed with the quality on show at High Bluff, the females had excellent structure and unlike the average Canadian female, many of these had good muscular development while keeping phenomenal maternal traits and breeding and rearing eye catching progeny. It was interesting to see the outcross breeding used on the farm with Australian, US and even some full French cows to be seen. After a truly enjoyable day viewing Charolais stock and conversing with passionate breeders, we departed for our mid-way hotel in Souris to get some well-deserved rest for another busy day ahead.

Monday morning after a quick breakfast we loaded up again and made our way to a zip-line centre. Throughout the 2 hour journey we discussed and dissected the week, many laughs were had, fun times re-visited and it was clear that no one wanted the trip to end; we were enjoying ourselves too much. Before we knew it we had reached our destination. This time we were the ones getting harnessed up! After a 3 hour trek around the mountains comprising of 9 zip lines we made our way back to our transport feeling very 'de-hydrated'. We made the short journey to C2 Charolais where we had our lunch before viewing some of the cows and calves. C2 Charolais is located in La Riviere, Manitoba and is owned and run by the Cavers family. They run a herd of 100 purebred Charolais cows and 50 commercials. We spent some time viewing a group of the purebred stock on show and were intrigued to hear Jeff tell us about how he implements rotational grazing a practice which unlike at home here in Ireland, is not commonly practiced in Canada. Jeff is definitely ahead of the pack when it comes to maximising output along with producing superior grass fed cattle in the process. Our final port of call of the day

was to Steppler Farms. Steppler Farms is a limited company based in Miami, Manitoba with 3 main enterprises, honey production, a large scale tillage farm and most importantly for us the home of 600 purebred Charolais cows. The Beekeeping side of the business is ran by one of three brothers Ian, the tillage side of the business is ran by another brother Adam and the Charolais enterprise is ran by another brother Andre. Upon arrival at the farm, we were first taken for a tour of the honey processing facilities which were very impressive; it was a great opportunity to witness such a facility. Next we had a quick tour of the machinery yard used in the tillage farm and we also got to see a crop of maize which was almost identical to what we would see in Ireland. And saving the best to last, we finally got to visit Andres Charolais herd and a very impressive operation it proved to be. He runs the largest purebred Charolais herd in Manitoba. 600 females are calved down every spring comprising of approx. 100 heifers and 500 cows. If this was not already impressive enough the fact that he calves them all down in a 60-70 day calving spread was jaw dropping. Andre culls hard selecting for good structure, udder formation and most importantly calving ease. Come July/August Andre would have 450-500 cows with calves at foot on the farm with the difference being sold off the farm. Some of these would have been cows scanned empty and the remainder were cows not suiting Andres breeding programme and would be sold onto commercial farms where they would still be fine breeding females. Steppler Farms spring bull sale comprised of 83 lots averaging \$6,331 with a high seller of \$20,000. The visit to Steppler Farms really opened our eyes to the potential Charolais genetics have as a maternal breed not only a terminal breed. After our tour had finished we enjoyed Charolais steaks before heading for our final trip to our hotel beside the airport where it all began one week previous.

The next morning with the airport in sight we packed our bags with weary eyes and a heavy heart; this was the end of a fairy tale week for any young Charolais breeder. The knowledge, skills and positivity we bring home with us is without doubt invaluable, but the friendships we have made with breeders all across Canada and the world will no doubt be life-long and for this we can't be thankful enough. To conclude, we would like to sincerely thank Candace and Helge By for their hospitality and patience with us over the week-long trip! Also, we want to express our gratitude to the Canadian Charolais Youth Association for inviting us to their event and allowing us to participate in their fantastic competitions, it is certainly an event that they should be very proud of and one that every country could learn something from.



Group photo of all young members at CCYA 2018







Michael and Mark demonstrating their showmanship skills to the Judges



A demonstration on the Canadian style of grooming cattle for show





Mark and Michael photographed along with Helge and Candace By





Visit to Hunter Charolais



Visit to C2 Charolais



Visit to Steppler farms