



Number One in the World. Number One in Sweden!

By Dr. Tom Lawlor, Director Research and Development, Holstein Association USA

One of the pleasures of doing business in a global economy is the opportunity to travel and meet with dairy breeders from around the world. Recently, I had the good fortune to go to an Interbull meeting in Sweden. In addition to talking about genetics and new methodology for calculating international genetic evaluations, we do actually talk about cows. So, I naturally wanted to learn more about the local Swedish genetics.

Although I didn't have a lot of time to visit farms, being that it was June, I did a quick study of the cows in the pastures. In general, the Holsteins looked pretty good, showing many of the fine qualities you'd see in Holsteins most anywhere in the world.

But it's also evident that perhaps there's too much reliance on local genetics. It's easy to see the udders, feet and legs are not quite on par with their North American relatives. Nor do they show the same combination of strength, capacity and dairyness that is of growing importance throughout the U.S.

Looking at the bull proofs was even more revealing. There are a few Swedish bulls with pretty good numbers. Four Swedish bulls have TPIs of +1600 and greater, along with 2 to 3 bulls that would be in the top 100 for fat and protein, respectively.

What was a little surprising, given that the Nordic countries are heavily promoting health traits, was how well the U.S. bulls rank for health and fitness in Sweden. On the Swedish longevity scale, there are 38 U.S. bulls among the top 100 compared to only 10 domestic Swedish bulls. On the U.S. scale, 60 of the top Productive Life bulls are from the U.S. and only one from Sweden. The U.S. has much more to offer Sweden than the Swedes have to offer the U.S.

Productive Life			
<i>Swedish</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls		<i>USA</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls	
10 in Sweden	1 in the U.S.	38 in Sweden	60 in the U.S.
Service Sire Calving Ease			
<i>Swedish</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls		<i>USA</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls	
6 in Sweden	1 in the U.S.	53 in Sweden	65 in the U.S.
Somatic Cell Score			
<i>Swedish</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls		<i>USA</i> bulls among the best 100 bulls	
3 in Sweden	0 in the U.S.	14 in Sweden	33 in the U.S.

Source: USDA - AIPL

I was particularly curious about the Swedish Reds. Having no first-hand knowledge, I decided to ask around. The answers I initially received gave me a sense that there was a story to be unearthed. Yes, breeders were aware of the attention their Reds were receiving around the world and they were happy to hear of my interest. They wanted to know what I knew about them and what questions I had.

Being a Holstein enthusiast, I came clean and told them I didn't know that much about the Reds. What I couldn't understand was how this little breed, with a small population size and being progeny tested in only one country, was generating so much interest. If they could tell me how they compared to the Swedish Holsteins, I'd have a pretty good idea of how they compared to the U.S. Holsteins.



Farmers around the world who want high production, good fertility and low calving difficulty look at Holsteins.

Annual number of bulls being progeny tested around the world (Source: Interbull)

Holsteins: 8443 Jerseys: 693 Swedish Reds: 100

Number of countries with a major breeding program (testing more than 100 bulls/yr).

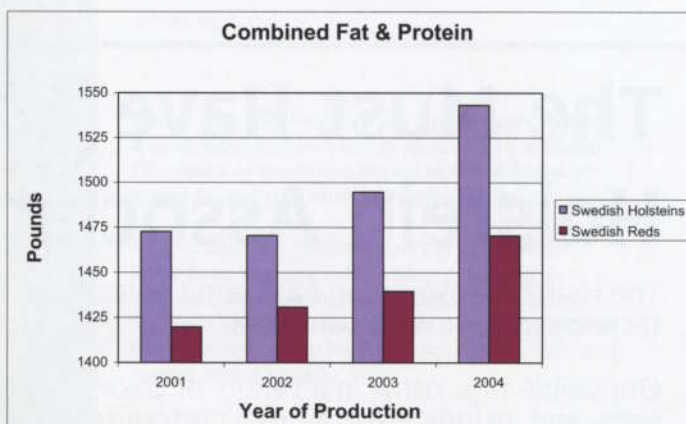
Holsteins: 17 Jerseys: 3 Swedish Reds: 1

I wanted to know what the Swedish farmers thought about the Reds. How did they like them? What did they think were the strengths and weaknesses of the Reds? Were they gaining in popularity in Sweden? Were the Swedes crossbreeding their Holsteins to the Reds?

After a wry smile appeared on their face and a moment of hesitation, I got my Paul Harvey moment when I heard the "rest of the story." Naturally, the Swedes are proud of their cattle but it does seem odd to them that their little known Red

breed is gaining international attention at the same time their popularity in Sweden is waning. The Reds were once the most popular breed in Sweden. But their popularity has declined in recent years. This has led to a funny description of the Reds by the Swedes, "They're number one in the world and number two in Sweden."

Sweden's dairying industry is undergoing change. Herds are getting bigger and management is becoming more intensive. Along with this change is a growth in popularity of the Holstein. The move to Holsteins by the Swedish farmers is both interesting and revealing. They have first hand experience with both breeds and they're choosing Holsteins.



Source: Holsteinkaktuellt, January 2005, page 15

The Holstein breed is fortunate to have breeders around the world. This gives us a large population to work with and the opportunity to seek out those cow families and mating sires that possess both high production and excellent health and fitness traits. Farmers who are looking for the total package, high production, good fertility, and low calving difficulty, need to look at Holsteins.

Swedish farmers have decided the cow of the future is the Holstein. They're the most popular choice. They're number one in the world and number one in Sweden!

