



## Ukraine: a future agricultural frontrunner?

by Chris Jackson, Export Manager UK TAG



This month I have had the privilege to visit Kiev for the very first time to see first hand something of Ukraine's

agricultural industry. In a country with more than 4272 million hectares of productive land and a population of only 42.5 million people, agriculture makes up a major part of their GDP.

In a system where land cannot be bought or sold, the farming companies have to negotiate leases from the freeholders

- who usually own very small parcels of land. The local landowners who individually own very few acres seem very willing to lease their share to some very major corporations, some of who have turnovers running into billions

of dollars. The country itself is rapidly developing its very significant rural economy to rank 'top 10 exporters of foodstuffs worldwide. Its major customers being China, India, Turkey and the EU, outside of which it still remains. 60 percent of its production comes from two regions, Mykolaiv and Potava, with maize/corn, wheat and barley being its main cereal based crops, all responsible for some 60 million tonnes per year. Potatoes however, are the main vegetable crop along with sugar beet and vegetables. It can be believed that with improving road and logistics, this country will become even more influential in the world's agriculture economy.

As well as producing crops, livestock has a major influence - with poultry the main product, annually producing about 1144 million tonnes of which seven percent is for export, with pig production taking second place at 760 million tonnes, most of which is consumed at home. Unlike the western palate, fat meat is sought after. Because of the countries land borders and large-scale intensive units, disease spread is a major problem. This is compounded by a lack of bio-security with many

workers having a few pigs at home and a large wild pig population. African swine fever is a major problem, which hopefully will be abated with the help of geneticists who are looking for the health gene, successful vaccination programmes along with increased bio-security. This in addition with the uptake of correct disposal of dead and diseased animals, the outbreaks can be limited and arrested. Not to mention the training of staff, which plays a key role in any successful control measures in raising awareness, control and prevention.

The dairy industry, which is heavily reliant on the Holstein breed, is having difficulty with its short life span, something we heard about at one of the seminars given during the exhibition. Perhaps the industry should look at some of the more developed dual-purpose animals which can not only produce quality calves for beef, but also whose milk can make more cheese when the kappa casein B gene is present.

In addition, with longer productive lives less expenditure is needed for herd replacement, which could lead to enhanced profitability. Perhaps it is time to look to alternative breeds and methods of production.

The vast scale of some of the farming enterprise that we saw are matched in few countries worldwide, along with effective management and their ability to produce high quality food is very impressive. This is where the correct formulation of animal feed becomes imperative. Now, with the technologies available we will be able to trace all farm inputs, so food safety and security can be addressed as the world's consumers continue to become more discerning buyers.

From the Ukraine, my next destination will be Thailand to lead a group of UK companies to attend VIV Asia in March to showcase some of the UK's expertise. I am looking forward to this event being very successful for all concerned, and I hope to see many of you there.