



Contest of cattle held in Carballo in 1911. Public witnessing the qualification of a calf by the veterinarians Ignacio Varela, Santos Romero and Rof Codina. Transferred by Diego Conde and extracted from the book by Juan Rof Codina, «Study of 50 Galician cows from the Ortigueira Contest», Veterinary Magazine of Spain 6, no 6 (February 1912): 220.

## One hundred years of 'creation' of Rubia Galega, an emblem of the country

By Manuel Rey - 07/05/2017

If there were to make a symbolic list of the biggest **signs of identity** in Galicia, the **Galician Blond** race would be in the first positions. It is a **key** element to understand the economy, the popular culture, the referendum, the literature and the daily life of the country. The process of selection and genetic improvement of the blonde is a history of centuries, and that continues today. One hundred years ago, in **1917**, veterinarian **Juan Rof Codina** published the monograph on the Galician bovine breed, a landmark for the genesis of the meat species par excellence of our territory.

In this work, which had been awarded the previous year by **the Livestock Association of the Kingdom**, is "where the bases of the morphotype of what would later be the Galician Blond Race", explains **Diego Conde Gómez**, doctor in Veterinary medicine, a member of the Group of Agrarian and Rural History of the Rural World (Histagra) of the USC and great connoisseur of the figure of Rof Codina.

Not as long as, according to Conde, the story **comes from far behind**. In the middle of the **nineteenth century** it is when you can begin to speak of the existence of a breed of cattle in the country "in which **specific characteristics can be defined** ." Until that moment, "the Galician bovine hut was made up of a **heterogeneous mosaic** with a single common denominator: the multipurpose character in its use". Thus, the cows were worth to produce **meat**, to give **milk** and like **animal of load** in agriculture. For this reason, it was difficult to carry out a **genetic selection** process .

 Cover of the work published by Rof Codina in 1917. Produced by Diego Conde Gómez.

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Not so, it is during this period, in the mid-nineteenth century, when Galicia begins to **export beef cattle** to the **English** market, coinciding with some initiatives to adapt to livestock for meat use. Subsequently, as explained by Diego Conde, this export boom went into **crisis**. The Galician producers therefore needed to **improve the breed** so that the quality of meat was better and, thus, to compete in international markets.



Thirty years before Rof Codina published his monograph, the **Royal Society of Friends of the Country** of Santiago drew up a report that established the **need to improve** the breed of the Galician cow. The text, according to Count Conde, "begins to explore which would be the ideal lines to make these changes, whether it was for selection in purity of race or through crossing with foreign races."


This decision - **purity or intersection** - marks the main debate that producers have maintained at the time that they began to work on improving breed. "Contrasts with the almost unanimous consensus that existed at that time on the need to obtain a breed of **cattle own** for the country, that had maintained its triple aptitude - meat, milk and load - to give solution to the needs of the farmers", exposes the investigator of Histagra .

Farmers have played a key role in the genesis of race

Nine years after the report of Friends of the Country, the ribadense **Juan Suárez Casas** marks in **1896** the first patterns of action: it establishes a comprehensive improvement plan , "which not only focused on the evolution of animals, but also on their **diet** , on **health** and in the **hygienic** conditions of the stables ". It proposes a **double track** , both of selection in purity and crossing with foreign races.

The **first** research **experiences** arose in the **School of Veterinary Medicine** of Santiago and in the **Agricultural-Experimental Farm** of A Coruña, the center of the current Center of Agricultural Investigations of **Mabegondo ( CIAM )**. Pioneers such as veterinarians **Pedro González, Demetrio Galán** and **Juan de Dios González Pizarro** , or the **agricultural engineer Hernández Robredo** , established the bases for these centers to begin with the zootechnical experimentation of the race, through different essays aimed at choosing the means and procedures more Suitable for improvement.

Over the years and according to the needs and demands of the markets, the characteristics have been defined. "It was first passed by the improvement for the production of **gooseberries** at the beginning of the **20th century** , the exploration of the **dairy capacity in the 20s and 30s** and, finally, after the **postwar period** , it was added to the properties that consolidated the Galician blonde as a **meat** breed ."

 Contest held in Cuntis in the year 1935. Transferred by Diego Conde.

*Rof Codina, in a contest held in Cuntis in 1920. Ceded by Diego Conde and extracted from "Cuntis Cattle Contest", Vida gallega, nº 158 (11-10-1920): 16.*

And in this context, the contributions of Rof Codina, which begins the **scientific categorization** of the Galician bovine breed. It elaborates an objective description, with **biometric data** , that allows to begin with the improvement of the animals according to a determined racial standard. Years later, in 1933, this project consolidated with **the Galician Bovina Galician Genealogy Book**.

"It's a case of success in technology transfer," says Diego Conde

Already passed the equator of the twentieth century, in **1969** , the Association of Breeders of the Galician Blonde Race ( **Acruga** ), which continues today with the work of consolidating the race through its protection and promotion.

It has been a **long process** thanks to which there is now an animal with "extraordinary characteristics" as a meat producer. "Excellent **maternal qualities** , very good **growth** rates and high performance of their **channels** ." At the same time, it has a great capacity for **adaptation** to different media and it is handy, which greatly facilitates its handling. In the same way, it has compatible features for **industrial crossing** with dairy production females.

For Diego Conde, the **participation of the livestock farmers** was key to getting Rubia Galega a sign of identity. "It is a case of success in **technology transfer**. The major changes were the result of the practical concretion of the technical and research proposals. Thus, the success and the failure of the

innovative contributions on the **demands of the cattle ranchers** ended up defining the race that exists at present. "It was a race designed to meet the needs of the farmer and the requirements that these were marking based on the demands of the market."

## The future

Improvement work is already a centenary, but **much remains to be done** . Currently, one of the challenges is the "enormous **pressure and competition** " of other **foreign** breeds of meat fitness. "From all areas, we must **promote measures** that help the consolidation of the race, not only in the country, but also in its internationalization process." Conde considers that "livestock farmers need to **become protagonists** " so that there is a **fluid dialogue** with the research centers, so that not only the real needs can be learned, but also that the innovations that are being reached will be implanted in the exploitations.

One of the competitive **advantages** of our native breed lies in the **nutritional quality** of its meat. "Recent studies show that the productive models obtained with Galician veal meat provide a product with profiles of **ideal fatty acids** , and can offer a protective character against **cardiovascular disease**. "

The nutritional quality of meat can be an ally against cardiovascular disease

"The Galician blond has a huge potential for the future," concludes Diego Conde. "We have a race with extraordinary **maternal** properties , **fertility** rates and **prolificity** above the average of the rest of the meat breeds," he says. In addition, it maintains good **milk** yields , which allows existing differentiated production initiatives of **Galician blond cheeses** , complemented by the production of **calves** . In strengthening this maternal line, according to Count, one of the **most important** parts of the future of the race resides .

With regard to **the industrial crossing** , "there are recent studies that show that the blonde offers **very favorable** results in the fertility, conversion and breeding conformation rates for other breeds, such as the Belgian limousine or blue.

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