**PRESS RELEASE 23/22**

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**Sheep young handlers set the standard high at Balmoral**

THERE was success in the showring for the sheep young handlers at Balmoral Show this year. The highly anticipated event, sponsored by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) attracted a bumper number of entries from across the province.

The competition was split into two age categories, 8–11 year olds and 12-14 year olds. First into the ring was the younger of the two age groups. The difficult task of placing the young handlers fell into the very capable hands of judge Michael Graham, from County Antrim. After taking some time to deliberate Mr Graham returned his verdict, announcing that Shannon Smyth would take home the champion rosette. Reserve went to Bethany Megarrell.

The 12-14 year old young handlers had a hard act to follow, but the 11 strong group stepped out with confidence and led their animals around the showring before settling into their spots in the competition line-up. Mr Graham examined each animal carefully and quizzed the young handlers on their knowledge of the breeds before announcing his winner. Cream of the crop in this category was Zara Smyth. Reserve went to Lucy Wells.

On conclusion of both classes Mr Graham said, “It’s a privilege to stand in front of a group of young people from both classes with outstanding abilities and knowledge. The difference in placing right throughout both classes is very small, it boils down to maybe a small answer they gave in their knowledge. The standard throughout the class was exceptional and the future of exhibiting sheep at shows is in very good hands when you see the abilities of these young people.”

Commenting LMC board member, Joe Stewart said, “From the moment the young handlers entered the ring it was clear that they had tremendous skill in managing and exhibiting their animals. On display was a wide range of breeds, each with their own unique qualities. It was positive to see the camaraderie among the young handlers and the rapport they had with their animals. With the standard set incredibly high from the outset, it’s fair to say that judge Michael Graham had no easy task in selecting who should take the top spots in this competition.

“On behalf of LMC I wish to extend a hearty congratulations to sisters Shannon and Zara Smyth from Castlederg on taking home the champions titles from this competition, and to Bethany Megarrell and Lucy Wells on taking reserve champion in their respective age categories. I would indeed congratulate and commend all those who took part in this year’s competition.”

LMC chief executive Ian Stevenson extended the Commission’s thanks to all those involved in planning and co-ordinating the event. He said, “LMC was delighted to provide sponsorship for this event. We wish to take this opportunity to thank the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) for facilitating this competition, Mr Graham, for giving of his time and expertise to judge the competition and finally, all young handlers who entered; events like this would not be possible without their unwavering passion and commitment to showcase the very best of our local livestock.”

**ENDS**

**Photo captions**

**Photos can be accessed here -** [Balmoral Show 2022](https://lmcni0-my.sharepoint.com/%3Af%3A/g/personal/lsurphlis_lmcni_com/ElNeTSmU9f9ArDzIdrdTt54BYKserGpYp5iHlcycGuVMSQ?e=qjBS0z)

**001 – LMC board member Joe Stewart pictured with Shannon Smyth sheep young handler champion in the 8-11 age group. Also pictured is judge, Michael Graham.**

**002 - LMC board member Joe Stewart pictured with Bethany Megarrell sheep young handler reserve champion in the 8-11 age group. Also pictured is judge, Michael Graham.**

**003 - LMC board member Joe Stewart pictured with Zara Smyth sheep young handler champion in the 12-14 age group. Also pictured is judge, Michael Graham.**

**004 - LMC board member Joe Stewart pictured with Lucy Wells sheep young handler reserve champion in the 12-14 age group. Also pictured is judge, Michael Graham.**

**Notes to Editor**

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For more information contact LMC on: 028 9263 3000

**Media Contacts**

Lauren Patterson, LMC Marketing and Communications Manager. E: lpatterson@lmcni.com

Linda Surphlis, LMC Communications Manager. E: lsurphlis@lmcni.com