

The BACKYARD

COW

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE
to Keeping a Productive Family Cow

SUE WEAVER
author of *Stony's Babes*
Ricki's Making Lovers!



The
BACKYARD
COW

An Introductory Guide to
Keeping Productive Pet Cows

Sue Weaver



Storey Publishing

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Preface

When I was a little girl, most evenings I would sit cross-legged by the road waiting for the evening cow parade. That was when our neighbor, the younger of two dairy-farming bachelor brothers, drove his cattle home. He'd wave and I'd wave and that was that — until the night he let me ride pretty Bonnie.

Bonnie was a doe-eyed, rusty brown Jersey with a bell around her neck. She was old and gentle to a fault. As she plodded along the well-worn cow path that paralleled the road, I felt like a princess on a pretty palfrey.

After that I often waited at the road with cookies: two for Mr. Engle and one for my new friend Bonnie, and from time to time he let me ride her. That was when the madness began. I still lived and breathed horses (my childhood passion), but I wanted a cow to ride too. That desire didn't diminish through the years, and 55 years later I achieved my goal. Now I'm raising my very own riding and driving steers.

What I learned when I bought my first steer is this: Almost everything written about cattle addresses cattle in herds, not the house cow kept to furnish families with homegrown dairy products, nor a steer or two for riding and driving. This is the book I wish I had had when I first started. It is for those people who want to keep cattle on a small scale, be it for household dairy or recreational purposes (or both), and who also want to know a bit of the history and folklore surrounding their new bovine friends.

So let's get moooving. Bring on the cows!

Part One

Meet the Cow



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Brief History



.....

*May cows stay in front of me,
May cows stay behind me,
May cows stay on both sides of me,
May I always reside in the midst of cows.*

— Sanatana Goswami and Gopala Bhatta Goswami,
Hari Bhakti Vilasa, 16.252

.....

Cattle have provided humans with meat, milk, draft power, and leather for upwards of 10,000 years. Their tallow fueled oil lamps and was used to make candles, necessities of ancient (and not so ancient) life. Cattle furnished dung to nourish the earth; dried, it served as cooking and heating fuel where none other existed. Artisans used cow horn to fashion utilitarian items like spoons, powder horns, and flacons, but also to craft musical instruments as well as exquisite works of art. Bones were used to create amulets, pendants, and beads. Wealth was frequently reckoned in cattle, and cattle paid for many a herdsman's bride. Cattle have been used for religious sacrifices for many thousands of years, yet they were (and still are) sacred to people of many faiths.

The story of mankind's love affair with the bovine tribe is a rich feast to be savored, so

rather than serve it up in a single, sumptuous meal, we've scattered it throughout this book in tantalizing tidbits. Watch for them as this tale unwinds.

First Came the Aurochs

In the beginning was the aurochs, an immense wild bovine whose name means "primeval ox." More than one million years ago, the aurochs spread from its original home in Pakistan and India to the far corners of Asia, Europe, and Africa, surviving when other prehistoric mammals of its ilk became extinct.

Compared to modern cattle, aurochs were long-legged, front-heavy, and enormous. Based on bone measurements, the average European aurochs bull weighed 2,000 pounds (910 kg) and stood 17 hands tall at his massive shoulders; that's almost 6 feet (1.8 m) — one really

big cow. Females were smaller. Both sexes had graceful, lyre-shaped horns, each up to 3 feet (just under 1 m) in length, that tipped forward in the style of Spanish fighting bulls. From ancient cave paintings, the most famous being the Lascaux cave paintings in southern France, we know that European aurochs bulls were generally sooty black with a cream-colored dorsal stripe; cows and calves of both sexes were reddish brown. All had cream-colored areas encircling their muzzles.

Paleontologists believe the aurochs reached Europe as early as 250,000 BCE. Eventually, their range extended north through the British Isles to southern Scandinavia, then east through Europe and north to Siberia. They roamed North Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia too. They were, however, gradually hunted to extinction until the seventeenth century, when the last herd of

aurochs remained in a royal game preserve in Poland. Despite royal efforts to conserve them (killing one was punishable by death), the last living aurochs, a cow, was killed by poachers in 1627. Thus ended the reign of the largest cattle ever known to walk this earth.

Taming the Aurochs

Aurochs were tamed three or four times and from these domestications came the ancestors of modern-day cows. By comparing recent DNA tests of scores of living breeds of cattle to DNA lifted from ancient aurochs bones, scientists now believe that there were separate domestications in India, southern Turkey, North Africa, and possibly the Far East.



An aurochs bull redrawn from a painting known as the Augsburg Aurochs, which probably dates to the sixteenth century

IT'S NO BULL

- The wild oxen referred to as *re'em* in the Bible were aurochs.
- The Anglo-Saxon rune Ur (called Uraz in earlier Scandinavian runic alphabets) is a pictograph of the aurochs; it is the rune of energy, passion, and strength. Of it, the author of one of the ancient runic poems states, "The aurochs is proud and has great horns; it is a very savage beast and fights with its horns; a great ranger of the moors, it is a creature of mettle."
- An aurochs head figures prominently in the coat of arms of Mecklenburg in Germany, as well as the national coats of arms of Moldavia and Romania.

All aurochs were not the same; three subspecies evolved, each best suited to the conditions in which they lived. The first split occurred 200,000 years ago, when the Indian aurochs split from the Near Eastern variety. A second division occurred 25,000 years ago between African and the Near Eastern aurochs from areas of northeastern Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Cattlespeak 101

BEEF CATTLE. Breeds of cattle developed primarily for meat production.

BOVINE. A ruminant mammal belonging to the genus *Bos*.

BULL. A sexually mature, uncastrated male bovine.

CALF. A young bovine of either sex.

COW. A mature female bovine.

DAIRY CATTLE. Breeds of cattle developed primarily for milk production.

DRAFT CATTLE. Breeds of cattle developed primarily for farm work, driving, or riding.

DUAL-PURPOSE CATTLE. Breeds of cattle developed for more than one purpose, such as beef and milk production.

FAMILY COW. A cow maintained for home milk production.

HEIFER (pronounced heffer). A young female bovine prior to the time that she has produced her first calf.

HERD. A group of cattle.

HOUSE COW. A family cow.

OX (plural: **OXEN**). A mature steer used for draft purposes (including riding); an ox is called a bulluck in many countries.

RIDING STEER. An adult steer or ox trained for riding purposes.

STEER. A male bovine castrated prior to puberty. Mature riding steers are technically oxen.

TRIPLE-PURPOSE CATTLE. Breeds developed for beef, dairy, and draft purposes.

uncovered domestic cattle bones at Capeletti, Algeria, dating to roughly 4500 BCE, they thought these cattle descended from both humped and humpless cattle introduced by traders from the East. DNA suggests otherwise. Archaeologists recently unearthed what appear to be domestic cattle bones at Na'ata Playa and Bir Kiseiba in Egypt that date to 7000 BCE.

Early studies suggest that the Turano-Mongolian type of cattle found in northern China, Mongolia, Korea, and Japan may represent a fourth domestication event (and a third event among *Bos taurus*-type taxa). This group may have diverged from the Near East group some 35,000 years ago.

What Is a Cow?

Technically, a cow is a mature female bovine that has produced her first calf. However, in this book we'll sometimes use the term in a more colloquial manner. For our purposes, a cow is a bovine of any age or any sex, as in "Come get your cows, they're ravaging my garden" or "I love cows." We'll also use specific terms when the need arises.

Cattle are domestic ungulates (animals that stand on the tips of their toes to sustain their body weight). They are members of the family Bovidae (cloven-hoofed animals including cattle, sheep, goats, and a host of bovines) and subfamily Bovinae (composed of cattle,

and their cousins as well as four-horned and spiral-horned antelope, all of which have cloven hooves and, often, horns); they also belong to tribe Bovini (large to very large grazers). Genus (generic name) *Bubalus* is composed of water buffalo. And finally we come to genus *Bos*: aurochs, domestic cattle, yaks, banteng, gayal, gaur, and kouprey.

Breeders cross different breeds of cattle to yield hybrids that have better production traits than either of the parents. All *Bos* species can interbreed, although not all of their hybrid offspring are fertile.

Consider the *dzo* (male) and *dzomo* (female), sometimes collectively referred to as *yakows*, offspring of yaks and domestic cattle. These stolid, shaggy beasts are commonly encountered in Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia (where they're called *khainag*). Due to the phenomenon of hybrid vigor they are larger and stronger than either parent; furthermore, dzomo give more milk than female yaks, and the meat of either sex is said to taste better than beef. First-generation males are sterile,

but females are capable of bearing young. A dzomo crossed with either a domestic bull or yak bull is called an *ortoom*, and an *ortoom* crossed with a domestic bull or yak bull results in a *usanguzee*. Yak and their cattle hybrids make fine pack animals and riding steers.

Cattle are often crossed with American bison to produce *beefalo* and *cattalo* (they are the same hybrid, though in the United States the term cattalo generally refers to crosses with significantly bison-like characteristics). Like dzo and dzomo, first-cross males are usually sterile, but females are fertile. The beefalo is

Holy Cow!

CATTLE RHYME

THE EARLIEST RECORDED VERSION of this poem was printed in *Mother Goose's Melody* around 1765 in London. Here is the most common modern-day version.

Hey diddle diddle,
The Cat and the fiddle,
The Cow jumped over the moon,
The little Dog laughed to see such a sight,
And the Dish ran away with the Spoon.



This antique print depicting a yak, Cape buffalo, and gayal is from Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, 6th edition (Leipzig, Germany; 1909).

now an established breed with its own breed registry, the American Beefalo World Registry (see Resources). Due to their bison heritage (bison have never been successfully domesticated), beefalo do not make good riding or driving animals for any but the most skillful of trainers.

During the 1960s, Polish scientists crossed wisent (European bison) with domestic cattle to produce *żubroń*, Europe's answer to the beefalo. Experiments persisted into the 1980s, and then the program was discontinued. The last living *żubroń* are protected in Białowiecki National Park near Białowiecki in Poland.

The domestic *gayal* (also called *tadock* or *mithun*) of India and Southeast Asia is thought to be descended from hybrids of wild gaur and domestic cattle. They are widely used as milk, meat, and draft animals within their distribution range; once trained they're so mild that the Chin tribe in Burma says an easygoing person is "gentle as a mithun."

Unfortunately, domestic cattle (genus *Bos*) mated with water buffalo (genus *Bubalus*) cannot produce viable offspring; their developing embryos die around the eight-cell stage.

IT'S NO BULL

The word **bovine** is derived from Latin *bos* (ox) and from Late Latin *bovinus*.

Cow began as the Middle English word *cou* (plural: *kye* or *kyn*). *Cou* was derived from Old English *cū*, and that from Proto-Germanic *kūz*. It is perhaps imitative of a cow mooing.

The common archaic plural word for **cows** in English was *kine*.

The word **cattle** was first recorded in 1250 and is derived from Old French *catel*, meaning "property." It wasn't limited to cows until the mid-sixteenth century.

The Breed You Need



.....
*Size alone is not enough or the cow
would outrun the hare.*

— Polish proverb
.....

According to the Texas A & M University publication *Breeds of Beef Cattle* (see Resources), there are approximately 250 recognized breeds of cattle throughout the world and several hundred more that aren't recognized as separate breeds. More than 80 beef breeds reside in the United States alone. When you add dairy breeds and old-fashioned dual-purpose cattle, that's a lot of beef!

Choosing a Breed

Which breed you need depends on an array of factors, including what you plan to do with your animal, your climate, your facilities, availability, and price. Not the least of these factors is personal preference. That cow or steer might also be a mixed breed, like my handsome black riding steer, Aiah, whose mom is a Holstein and sire a Jersey bull.

Use. Historically, most breeds were dual- or triple-purpose cattle; today most breeds are used for a single purpose. Take Herefords.

We think of them as the quintessential beef breed, but Herefords were developed as much to serve as brawny oxen as they were for their meat-making ability. Braunvieh, the European ancestors of our Brown Swiss dairy cows, were a triple-purpose breed providing draft power, meat, and milk; in North America, the Braunvieh is classified today as a beef breed. Even now, unless you need a lot of a given commodity, dual-purpose breeds make sense. If, for example, you don't need a huge supply of milk, "milky" beef breeds with a dairy background make fine household dairy cows, and their calves will make an excellent addition to your freezer.

Are you looking for a steer to ride or drive (see box on page 10)? While most riding steers are Longhorns, mostly because the Longhorn community promotes its riding steers, any breed that's tall and brawny enough to pack your weight works too. Woolly breeds like Highlands and Galloways look great under saddle, and Ankole-Watusi steers turn heads too. Or opt for a dairy breed as a riding or driving

Riding Steers (and Cows)

Right now you may be thinking, “Did she say riding steer?” Yes, I did. Steers and nonlactating cows make fine, fun mounts for riders who favor a touch of the unusual, and tame cattle are easy to teach to ride. They’re slow and steady and give their riders time to smell the roses. We’ll show you how to outfit and train your riding cow or steer in chapter 7.

steer; but the calves of the common dairy breeds are readily available at very low cost.

Climate. Though most cattle adapt to any climate, why push the envelope? Highlands won’t be comfortable in the Southeast states, and Brahman’s won’t fare well in the Far North. Take where you live into account. It’s better to work with Nature instead of against her.

Facilities. Consider where your cows will live as well. Some breeds adapt to confinement, others don’t; some thrive on coarse grass and brush while others require lush grass and grain. A tiny cow like a Dexter or Miniature Jersey can fit in a suburban backyard where zoning isn’t an issue, but a Friesian won’t.

Conservation concerns. Certain heritage breeds like Kerrys, Canadennes, and Randall Timebacks are very rare, and each female within its population is needed to perpetuate the breed. If you choose one of these rare jewels, be prepared to mate her to bulls of her own breed and make certain her offspring fall into the hands of fellow conservation owner breeders.

Availability and price. Depending on the breed you prefer, availability and price can be issues. Ubiquitous cattle like unregistered Halsteins, Herefords, and black baldies (white-faced black belt cattle with one Hereford and one Angus parent) are readily available no matter where you live, but you’ll probably see a fair

Why Focus on These Breeds?

THERE ARE WAY TOO MANY interesting cattle breeds to describe them all in a book of this size. So, I’ve taken the liberty of choosing two dozen breeds that are available in North America and have qualities that make them excel as house cows, working steers, or both.

I’ve omitted Continental breeds like the Limousin, Charolais, and Chianina, even though these brawny, good-looking cattle can make stellar riding steers. According to studies conducted by

livestock behaviorist Temple Grandin (see Resources), Continental breeds are often dangerously reactive — not a desirable trait when you’re perched atop a 2,000-pound (900 kg) animal’s back. If you favor Continental breeds and you know your way around cattle, start with a calf and be extra-patient and thorough with his training. If not, stick with the breeds highlighted in this chapter and you’re much more likely to meet with success.

and wide for a purebred Miniature Jersey or a Normande (and you'll pay more for her, too).

Before you go shopping for a breed, make a list of characteristics you must have in your cow or steer, be it the ability to milk 5 gallons (19 l) of milk a day, a kind disposition, beauty (as you perceive it), or even flashy horns. In the end, pride of ownership accounts for a lot, so choose a breed or crossbreed that suits your purpose and pleases your eye.

Heritage Breeds

Heritage breeds are traditional livestock breeds that were raised by farmers in the past, before the rise of industrial agriculture. In earlier times most animals were multipurpose breeds that did several things fairly well but none of them superbly. Today's factory farms depend on specialist breeds that do one thing the fastest and cheapest way they possibly can, usually in huge numbers maintained under confinement conditions. Food produced in this manner, be it milk, meat, or eggs, tends to be relatively inexpensive for consumers to buy but tasteless compared to farm products of yore.

That's where heritage breeds come in. Though scarce and increasingly in need of conservation, they still produce superior-tasting products the way they used to. There are dozens of heritage cattle breeds to choose from.

Several groups around the globe work to promote and help conserve heritage livestock breeds (see Resources for more information). Britain has the Rare Breeds Survival Trust; Canada, Rare Breeds Canada. The Rare Breeds Trust of Australia and the Rare Breeds Conservation Society of New Zealand operate down under. Safeguard for Agricultural

Varieties (SAVE) and Monitoring Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe cover all of Europe. We have the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, a nonprofit membership organization working to protect over 150 breeds of livestock and poultry from extinction. The following breeds are in the Critical and Threatened categories of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy's 2010 Conservation Priority List (CPL).

ANKOLE-WATUSI

TYPE. Beef, ornamental

CONSERVATION STATUS. Recovering (ALBC)

ORIGIN. East Africa, particularly Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi

SIZE. Bulls weigh 1,000 to 1,600 pounds (450–725 kg); cows, 900 to 1,200 pounds (400–550 kg)

COLOR. Any; dark red, with or without spots, is the most common color

HORNS. Humongous! Usually lyre- or crescent-shaped; as long as 60 inches (1.5 m), with bases up to 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter

Ankole-Watusis, sometimes called simply Watusis, are descendants of Egyptian (Hamitic) Longhorns depicted in pictographs dating to 4000 BCE.

Zoos and game parks in England, Germany, and Sweden imported Ankole and Watusi cattle during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where the two strains were ultimately combined to create the Ankole-Watusi. American zoos purchased European stock in the 1920s and 1930s, and some of their offspring eventually fell into private hands.

Ankole-Watusi cattle are hardy, efficient grazers, extremely heat tolerant, and insect resistant.

Understanding the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy Conservation Priority List

LIVESTOCK BREEDS on the ALBC Conservation Priority List (CPL) generally conform to certain genetic and numerical parameters:

1. The breed is from one of the seven traditional U.S. livestock species: asses, cattle, goats, horses, pigs, rabbits, and sheep.

2. The breed census satisfies numerical guidelines:

CRITICAL. Fewer than 200 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 2,000

THREATENED. Fewer than 1,000 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 5,000

WATCH. Fewer than 2,500 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 10,000. Also included are breeds that present genetic or numerical concerns or have a limited geographic distribution

RECOVERING. Breeds that were once listed in another category and have exceeded Watch category numbers but are still in need of monitoring

STUDY. Breeds that are of genetic interest but either lack definition or lack genetic or historical documentation

3. The breed is a true genetic breed (when mated together, it reproduces the breed type).

4. The breed has had an established and continuously breeding population in the United States since 1925. Or if imported or developed since 1925:

- The foundation stock is no longer available.
- Must be below global guidelines for inclusion (see #2)
- Must have at least three breeding lines in the United States.
- Must have at least twenty breeding females in the United States.
- Must have at least five breeders in different locations in the United States.
- Must have an association of breeders in the United States.
- Must be contributing to the breed's survival internationally. In general, this means that the United States population is reciprocal to other international populations (registry must be sanctioned by the mother organization so as not to be a dead end for the breed), and breeding stock must be licensed according to the rules of mother organization; or is an important and numerous population when compared to that in other countries; or the non–United States populations of the breed are at risk geographically or politically.



ANKOLE-WATUSI

They are said to be easily trained. According to the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, approximately 1,500 Ankole-Watusi cattle are found outside of Africa, and about 80 percent of these are in the United States. If you're looking for a head-turning riding cow or steer, this is your breed! In addition, cows give a respectable amount of high-butterfat milk and Ankole-Watusi beef, which is low in fat and cholesterol, is noted for its pleasing flavor.

AYRSHIRE

TYPE. Dairy

CONSERVATION STATUS. Watch (ALBC)

ORIGIN. Southwest Scotland

SIZE. Bulls weigh around 1,850 pounds (850 kg); cows, 1,000 to 1,300 pounds (450–600 kg)

COLOR. White with reddish-brown to mahogany-colored, ragged-edged splashes and spots

HORNS. Medium-length; lyre-shaped and curvaceous

Ayrshires are beautiful, midsize dairy cows with acceptable beef value; steers make fine riding



AYRSHIRE

and driving animals. The breed was developed in the County of Ayr in Scotland prior to 1800, where it was first called the Dunlop, then the Cunningham, and finally the Ayrshire. A Scottish breed society was established in 1814. Ayrshires first came to America in 1822, and their rugged constitutions made them immediate favorites throughout New England, where they are still relatively plentiful today.

Ayrshires are always red and white with spots, though some are almost all red and others nearly white. Though nowadays they're usually dehorned, left to their own devices they grow exquisite horns that are usually a foot or more in length and curve out, then up and back.

The breed is very hardy and thrives on marginal pasture in both hot and cold climates. Ayrshires are alert and intelligent; their calves are robust, vigorous, and easy to raise. This breed makes a fine house cow capable of producing, according to United States Department of Agriculture figures, up to 19,000 pounds (8,600 kg) of 4 percent butterfat milk in a 305-day lactation.

IT'S NO BULL

On October 22, 1933, when Admiral Richard E. Byrd and his crew aboard the *Jacob Rupert* set sail for a two-year stay in Antarctica, they were accompanied by three Guernsey milk cows that provided them with milk: Deerfoot Maid, Foremost Southern Girl (from J. C. Penney's Emmadine Farm in Hopewell Junction, New York), and Nira Pola Guernsey, better known as Klondike Nira. To accommodate the cows, the *Jacob Rupert* also carried 20 tons of hay, 12 tons of beet pulp, 2 tons of bran, and sand and straw for bedding.

Just 275 miles north of the Antarctic Circle, on December 19, Klondike Nira gave birth to a bull calf named Iceberg.

The *Jacob Rupert* dropped anchor in the Bay of Whales on January 17, 1934, where the cattle walked almost three miles across the ice to Little America. There they lived in a tent until a cow barn was fashioned out of blocks of ice.

Klondike Nira contracted frostbite in Little America and had to be put down, but in 1935 the remaining cows and Iceberg were returned to their owners after traveling more than 22,000 miles round-trip. They were the first (and only) cattle to travel to Antarctica.



BELTED GALLOWAY

BELTED GALLOWAY

TYPE. Beef, dairy

CONSERVATION STATUS. Recovering (ALBC); Endangered (Canada); Rare (New Zealand)

ORIGIN. Southwest Scotland near the English border

SIZE. Bulls weigh from 1,700 to 2,200 pounds (770–1,000 kg); cows, 1,000 to 1,500 pounds (450–680 kg)

COLOR. Black, dun, or chocolate brown with a wide white band around the body, usually stretching from just behind the shoulders to the pin bones

HORNS. Galloways are always polled (born with no horns)

Belted Galloways, affectionately referred to by admirers as “Belties,” are a strain of Galloway (see page 18 for more information on Galloways), but the animals have also been considered a separate breed since 1921, when the Dun and Belted Galloway Association organized in Scotland. There is also a herd book as well as Belted Galloway associations in North America. The cattle are slightly larger and “milkier” than the other Galloways and make decent dual-purpose house cows.



CANADIENNE



DEVON (RIGHT) AND MILKING DEVON

CANADIENNE

TYPE. Dairy

CONSERVATION STATUS. Critical (ALBC); Vulnerable (Canada)

ORIGIN. Quebec, Canada

SIZE. Bulls average 1,600 pounds (725 kg); cows 1,100 pounds (500 kg)

COLOR. Black, brown, red, or tan with lighter shading underneath, a fawn udder and fawn-banded muzzle, and (occasionally) white on the udder and underline or a white dorsal stripe along the back

HORNS. Short- to medium-length; white with black tips; curving up and inward

In 1541, Jacques Cartier, the Breton explorer who claimed Canada for France, imported French dairy cattle to Quebec. Explorer and administrator Samuel de Champlain imported additional cattle some 60 years later. The descendants of those French cattle became today's Canadienne. A breed society formed in 1886 but by the 1960s the breed was practically extinct.

Canadiennes, also sometimes called Black Jerseys, are extremely hardy, exceptionally docile cattle averaging about 15,000 pounds

(6,800 kg) of roughly 4.35 percent butterfat milk per lactation — and they're able to do it on marginal forage. Though critically rare, these interesting heritage cattle are actively registered by a Canadian association (see Resources), and the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy monitors them in the United States.

DEVON AND MILKING DEVON

TYPE. Devon: beef, draft. Milking Devon: dairy, beef, draft

CONSERVATION STATUS. Devon: Recovering (ALBC); Rare (New Zealand). Milking Devon: Critical (ALBC)

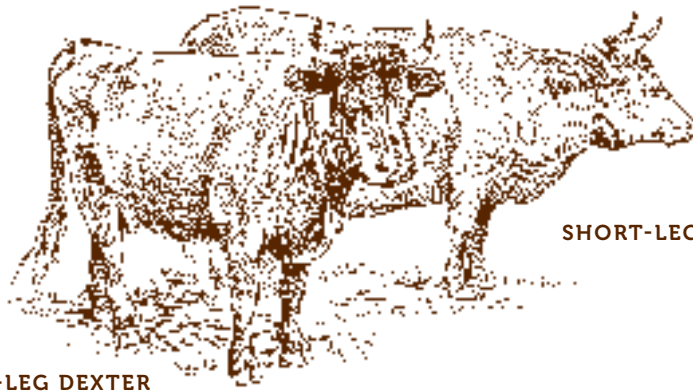
ORIGIN. Devonshire in southwestern England

SIZE. Bulls average 1,800 pounds (800 kg); cows, 1,100 pounds (500 kg)

COLOR. Rich, ruby red

HORNS. Medium-length; white with black tips (there is also a polled strain in North America)

The Devon is a very old breed that was already established in 1623 when Edward Winslow, agent for Plymouth Colony, purchased three red heifers and a bull for the colony's use. The



LONG-LEG DEXTER

SHORT-LEG DEXTER

DEXTER

breed became established in New England during the 1600s, where it was (and still is) cherished for its hardiness and the strength and speed of its oxen.

American fanciers chartered a breed registry in the mid-1800s. However, in the 1950s, with the market for dual-purpose breeds all but defunct, the organization split, becoming the American Milking Devon Association (which maintains the herd book for old-fashioned, triple-purpose cattle) and the American Devon Cattle Club (now the American Devon Cattle Association, for the new, “improved” beef-type Devon).

Devons, also referred to as “the Red Rubies,” are hardy, productive animals that still excel as oxen in New England. They would make striking riding and driving steers as well.

Oxen, Riding Steers, and Driving Steers

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What is the difference between oxen and riding and driving steers? Nothing. An ox (oxen is plural) is a mature working steer.

TYPE. Dairy, beef

CONSERVATION STATUS. Recovering (ALBC); Vulnerable (Canada)

ORIGIN. Southwest Ireland

SIZE. Bulls weigh 800 to 1,000 pounds (350–450 kg) and measure 38–44" (96–111 cm) at the withers; cows weigh around 750 pounds (350 kg) and are 36–42" (91–106 cm) tall

COLOR. Black, dun, and red, with white limited to the belly behind the navel and on the udder or scrotum

HORNS. Horned or polled. Horns are short and moderately thick, curving inward and then upward; they are white with black or red tips.

We can trace the lineage of Dexters to Stone Age cattle brought to Ireland from the Mediterranean basin. According to Professor David Low, writing in *On the Domesticated Animals of the British Islands* (1853), they were named for a “Mr. Dexter, agent to Maude Lord Howerden” who “is said to have produced his curious breed from the best of the mountain cattle of the district.” In 1882, Martin Stone of Oxfordshire imported a group of Dexters to England, where they became an instant sensation; a breed society was chartered in 1892. Wealthy

turn-of-the-century Americans like James J. Hill and August A. Busch stocked their country estates with Dexters. However, like other heritage cattle, Dexters lost ground to specialist breeds and were nearly extinct by 1970.

Dexters make ideal small family house cows, easily producing 2 to 3 gallons (7.5–11.5 l) of 4 percent butterfat milk per day, and Dexter oxen are amazingly strong for their size. Bulls are used to develop new miniature breeds.

Dexters come in two types: short-legged and long-legged varieties (the latter are sometimes referred to as Kerry types). A recessive gene for chondrodysplasia (dwarfism) is common in this breed and should be fully understood before buying breeding stock. An effective test for the gene is readily available, and by following sound breeding practices, the production of lethal bulldog (dwarf) calves can be avoided.

FLORIDA CRACKER AND PINEYWOODS

TYPE. Beef, dairy

CONSERVATION STATUS. Critical (ALBC)

ORIGIN. Florida Crackers: The longleaf pine regions of uppermost Florida. Pineywoods: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.

SIZE. Both sexes fall roughly between 600 and 1,000 pounds (270–450 kg); guinea cattle (naturally small individuals weighing one-third to one-half the normal size) occur in both breeds

COLOR. All

HORNS. Polled and horned; horns vary widely from short, curved dairy breed-type horns to Longhorn-looking long, upswept horns

Florida Crackers and Pineywoods (as well as Texas Longhorns) share a common history.



FLORIDA CRACKER

When Spain's rulers sent explorers and colonists to the New World, they sent cattle with them — to the tune of about 300 head. Some cattle escaped or were abandoned, and in time a vast feral population roamed New Spain. They became the Longhorns of Texas, the Corrientes of Mexico, and the Florida Crackers and Pineywoods cattle of the southeastern states.

During the mid-1900s, stockmen and farmers crossed these native breeds with heat-hardy American Brahman cattle, until purebreds almost ceased to exist. However, a handful of dedicated families in both regions maintained herds of pure, native stock, and in the 1990s the Pineywoods Cattle Registry and Breeders Association and the Florida Cracker Cattle Association were formed to preserve these breeds.

Florida Cracker and Pineywoods cattle are self-sufficient animals that thrive on rough pasture and brush, needing minimal human intervention. They are remarkably easy keepers. Both breeds are long-lived and prolific. Florida Crackers and Pineywoods come in spotted and solid colors including black, red, yellow, blue, speckle, lineback (a white line along the spine), and roan. Some lines lean more toward beef types, others lean more toward dairy. These would make outstanding riding and driving steers!

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