Breeds of Beef Cattle

At one time, cattle were hunted for food. Then, during the Stone Age in Europe and Asia, cattle were first domesticated so that they could also be used for draft purposes. Later, in the mid-1700s, an English farmer named Robert Bakewell made great improvements in cattle through selective breeding. Bakewell, who is known as the first great improver of cattle, selected for small, quick-maturing cattle and strived to improve meat quality. Today’s beef cattle producers are continually seeking to improve cattle and do so through crossbreeding to combine the best traits of several breeds.

Objective:

Identify common breeds of cattle and discuss their characteristics.

Key Terms:

- cutability
- marbling
- polled

Common Breeds in the Beef Industry

Purebred cattle in the United States are classified as either British or European breeds. The British breeds originated in England. They are also called the maternal breeds because they have good mothering ability. The British breeds include Angus, Red Angus, Hereford, and Shorthorn.

The European breeds are known for growing fast and being heavy muscled. The European breeds include Charolais, Gelbvieh, Limousin, Maine-Anjou, Salers, and Simmental.
Besides the British and European breeds, Brahman cattle, which originated from cattle in India, are also raised in the United States, along with several new breeds.

**ANGUS**

Angus cattle originated in Scotland and were brought to the United States in 1873. They are the most popular purebred beef cattle and have the largest worldwide breed registry. Angus cattle are black and **polled**, or born naturally without horns. They are moderate in size and are stylish with excellent balance. The Angus females are good maternally and have good fertility. Angus cattle are best known for producing high-quality carcasses with good **marbling**, which is the desirable presence of intramuscular fat.

**RED ANGUS**

When Angus cattle came to the United States, they could be either red or black. Starting in 1917, the American Angus Association did not allow red calves to be registered. The Red Angus Association was formed in 1954. From the beginning, the Red Angus breed has been focused on performance and carcass traits. Red Angus cattle have high weaning weights, are ready for market at an early age, and have docile, or tame, dispositions. Red animals do not absorb as much heat as black ones, making Red Angus more heat tolerant than black Angus.

**HEREFORD**

Hereford cattle originated in Hereford County, England, and were imported to the United States in 1817. A Hereford has a red body with a white face, dewlap, underline, and switch, and its legs are white below the hocks and knees. Herefords are heavy boned and early maturing. They have good thickness of body. Herefords also have good feed efficiency and are tolerant of cold climates because of their thick coats. Animals can be horned or polled and are easy to han-

**FURTHER EXPLORATION…**

**ONLINE CONNECTION: Breeds of Cattle**

Hundreds of breeds of cattle exist worldwide, and each breed has unique characteristics that may make it desirable. This lesson discusses 13 of the most popular cattle breeds in the United States, but many more cattle breeds are utilized in purebred and crossbreed cattle operations.

Using the Web site below, research a breed raised in the United States but not found in this lesson. Determine its origin, color patterns, and positive and negative characteristics. Possible choices are American White Park, Barzona, Belgian Blue, Braunvieh, Chianina, Murray Grey, and Texas Longhorn.

http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/
dle because of their moderate size and docile nature. In the late 1890s, Polled Hereford ani-
omals were started in Iowa by Warren Gammon, who gathered animals that were naturally
pooled and bred them to produce more polled animals.

**SHORTHORN**

Shorthorn cattle originated in northern England and were imported to the United States in
1783. Shorthorns can be red, white, or roan, which is a mixture of red and white hair. They
can be horned or polled. Polled Shorthorns were developed in 1870. Shorthorns are known for
their docile disposition, good maternal qualities, and exceptional milking ability. Shorthorns
also have good feed efficiency rates and excellent carcass qualities.

**CHAROLAIS**

Charolais cattle originated in the province of Charolais, France, and were imported to the United
States in 1936. They are white or light straw in color and can be horned or polled. Charolais cattle
are large framed, long bodied, and heavy muscled. The breed is large in comparison to others, with
mature bulls weighing 2,000 to 2,500 pounds and mature cows weighing 1,500 to 1,800 pounds.
Charolais cattle have a high
degree of feed efficiency and an exceptional weight per day of age. They are popular in
crossbreeding programs to increase size and muscle in the offspring of other breeds.

**GELBVIEH**

Gelbvieh cattle originated in Germany and were imported to the United States in 1971. Gelbviehs are traditionally golden yellow; however, black Gelbviehs have been developed recently. The breed excels in fertility, calving ease, mothering ability, and growth rate of calves.

**LIMOUSIN**

Limousin cattle originated in France and were imported to the United States in 1968. The
breed is golden wheat to rust-red colored, with the area around the muzzle a lighter version of
the body color. Black lines of Limousins have recently been developed. Limousins are heavy
muscled and long bodied. They are known for their calving ease. The breed is also known for carcass leaniness and large loin areas. Limousins excel in cutability, which is the quantity of available retail meat cuts from the carcass.

**MAINE-ANJOU**

Maine-Anjou cattle originated in France and were imported to the United States in 1970. The breed was developed through crossbreeding and is three-fourths Shorthorn and one-fourth Mancelle. Maine-Anjou cattle are dark cherry red and white; however, black animals have been developed recently. The breed has a high growth rate and is known for being heavy muscled with good carcass cutability and quality.

**SALERS**

Salers cattle originated in France and were imported to the United States in 1974. They have a solid, deep cherry red color; however, black animals have been developed recently. The Salers is known as the easiest-calving European breed. In addition, Salers cattle are known for good carcass quality, high growth rate, and good maternal traits.

**SIMMENTAL**

The Simmental breed originated in Switzerland, where it derived its name from the Simme Valley. The breed is very old, dating back to the Middle Ages, but it has been in the United States only since 1969, when it was brought here from Canada. The Simmental’s color pattern includes a white face that is dominant and a red and white spotted or nearly solid red body. Black strains of this breed have also been developed. Both polled and horned animals exist. The breed is known for rapid growth, heavy muscling, and a lean carcass.

**BRAHMAN**

Brahman cattle were developed in the southwestern part of the United States sometime between 1850 and the early 1900s after several animals were imported from India and bred to several British breeds. Brahmans vary in color from light gray or red to almost black. Recognizing a Brahman is
easy because of its loose skin, large hump over the shoulders, and large drooping ears. Brahman cattle are popular because of their resistance to disease and insects, tolerance to heat, and minimum outside fat on their carcasses. The breed is unpredictable in temperament. Brahmans have an excellent ability to forage successfully on poor range. Disadvantages of Brahman cattle include low fertility, low feed efficiency, and late puberty. Brahman-influenced cattle are very common in the southern part of the United States because of their heat tolerance.

**NEW BREEDS**

**Brangus**

The Brangus originated in the United States and is a cross of Brahman and Angus based on foundation stock that is three-eighths Brahman and five-eighths Angus. Brangus cattle are polled, and their color is solid black. Because of their genetics, they have many of the same characteristics as Brahman and Angus cattle.

**Beefmaster**

Beefmaster cattle were developed in Texas by combining one-half Brahman, one-fourth Shorthorn, and one-fourth Hereford. Coloration varies, but red is the dominant color. Beefmasters can be horned or naturally polled. The breed is very hardy and is known to milk well. Beefmaster cattle are popular because of their good temperament, hardiness, heavy weaning weight, and rapid weight gain.

**Summary:**

Purebred cattle in the United States are classified as either British or European breeds. The British breeds, which include Angus, Red Angus, Hereford, and Shorthorn, are known for their maternal abilities and carcass qualities. The European breeds, which include Charolais, Gelbvieh, Limousin, Maine-Anjou, Salers, and Simmental, are known for their growth traits and heavy muscling. Brahman cattle, which are classified as neither a British nor European breed, originated in India and are known for their resistance to insects and tolerance to heat. New American breeds, such as Brangus and Beefmaster, are gaining in popularity.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. Who was Robert Bakewell?
2. Name four of the British breeds of cattle.
3. Which breed of cattle has the largest worldwide breed registry?
4. Define marbling.
5. Name two positive traits of Hereford cattle.
6. Name two positive traits of Shorthorn cattle.
7. Name at least four of the European breeds of cattle.
8. Why is the Charolais breed popular in crossbreeding programs?
10. Which breed is known as the easiest-calving European breed?
11. Name at least two disadvantages of Brahman cattle.
12. Why are Brahman-influenced cattle very popular in the southern part of the United States?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Visit a local cattle producer. Be prepared to ask questions about the selection of breeding stock. Determine the breeds of cattle the producer buys and why.

Web Link:

Cattle Today
http://cattle-today.com

Agricultural Career Profiles
http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles