

## Farm Update

All of the 2016 calves have been born and are “running” the pastures. We still have limited availability on both heifer and bull calves in addition to a couple of brood cows. Many of next year’s calf crop are already in development with the sex of some 2017 calves already known. Please contact us for further information. Our delivery to the Mid-West will be in late July this year. (Our delivery to the Mid-West next year will be in October 2017.)

Fortunately weather conditions this year have been much more favorable to pasture growth. Last year we started to feed some grass hay in late June because of the lack of rain while this year will be more normal with pasture grass through most of August. Hay prices are down so that is also helpful.

## Quarterly Topic: Native (Heritage) Shorthorns Versus Modern Shorthorns

Choosing the type of Shorthorn to raise is a personal choice depending on interest and goals. Frequently there is confusion as to what constitutes a true Shorthorn since the use of the term Shorthorn has many adjectives including blue roan Shorthorns which are essentially Angus crosses. I will not consider Milking Shorthorns in this discussion. Native (Heritage) Shorthorn (NHS) pedigrees directly trace to the Coates Herd Book of 1822 in England with no introduction of other cattle breeds in the pedigree. Modern Shorthorns became a reality when appendix registrations (AR) were introduced by the American Shorthorn Association in 1973 to try increase the appeal of the Shorthorn breed to commercial cattle breeders. AR allowed for other breeds to be incorporated in the makeup of a Shorthorn and still be registered. The primary breed used was Maine Anjou.

NHS are often associated with the term dual purpose because originally Shorthorn cattle were developed as both a dairy and beef animal. Certainly some genetic lines tilted in one direction or the other but overall the Shorthorn breed tried to maintain the dual purpose mandate. Only in the 20th century did the split occur with the development of the separate beef and milking Shorthorns. As a result in 1948 the Shorthorn herd book split into the American Milking Shorthorn Society (dairy) and the American Shorthorn Association (beef). Subsequently true dual purpose (NHS) Shorthorns were left in the lurch.

Native (Heritage) Shorthorns are listed by the Livestock Conservancy as critically endangered and less than 500 are registered each year. Globally they are considered an endangered population. Their appeal continues to be their dual purpose function allowing for the production of both meat and milk—historically the “family cow” model. The American Milking Shorthorn Society developed the Native designation on Shorthorn pedigrees to indicate their purity and that all the ancestors on the pedigree traced to the Coates Herd Book. The actual pedigree will have an N on it to indicate this.

Modern Shorthorns may have varying levels of genetic contributions from other breeds of cattle. To be called a Shorthorn under current American Shorthorn Association standards they must be 15/16 Shorthorn. There may an indication on their pedigrees what breed was added. As Modern Shorthorns evolved, through the introduction of other breeds into their pedigrees, they split primarily into Show and Commercial Shorthorns. Many will argue that it’s not true but I believe any objective observer will see the difference between the “pampered” Show cow and

the rugged pasture/ranch cow. Show Ring Judges have definitely augmented the differences through selection. This is not an indictment of Show Shorthorns but an informational statement pointing out differences. Astute Shorthorn breeders/buyers can make their own decisions as to the merits of both types.

Because of the limited genetic pool of NHS it is important to be very knowledgeable in pedigrees to avoid inbreeding/line breeding complications. I believe there are a significant number of great NHS bulls still available (through artificial insemination) that can help broaden the NHS genetic pool. Through proper selection, true dual-purpose quality Shorthorns can fill the niche that has emerged in the grass fed and family cow markets. The reality is that some of the same old bulls (1950's, 60's and early 70's models) can also contribute to the commercial Shorthorn bull market because of the qualities that they add such as: muscling, hardiness, feed efficiency, easy calving, longevity and a myriad of other positive qualities. The easy fleshing and calving ease of many of these same bulls is well known. The difficulty is finding available semen and discerning how to use it produce the best Native (Heritage) Shorthorns.

These are exciting times in the Shorthorn breed with many options from Native to Show to Commercial Shorthorns. All types have their pros and cons. Prospective Shorthorn breeders must weigh all facets of Shorthorn production, from breeding to marketing, before embarking on a Shorthorn type. Having a breeding plan and then pursuing it in a thoughtful manner has the greatest chance of success. The "beauty" of the Shorthorn breed has always been its versatility. One could even say it is the "buffet" of cattle breeds because it can fill so many niches— commercial, dairy, show, family cow, grass fed beef, oxen, and utilization in many composite breeds to name some possibilities. I have both NHS and Modern Shorthorns, although long term I will eventually only have NHS because I believe the ones I am breeding will work in any environment. I have been fortunate to secure semen from many great old bulls, which through proper genetic management, will once again produce great dual purpose Shorthorns that buyers can employ in any cattle raising endeavor. This is the reason the Shorthorn breed was the most popular cattle breed in the world for over a hundred years.

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