

Shorthorns: What is in a name?

General Update

I have slowly managed to get back on track with time management that allows me to write more Shorthorn Bulletins. As with all of us the last year has been a trying one, and I think it is fair to say, things will never be the same. I take solace in my commitment to Heritage Shorthorns and hope that I can continue to provide interesting and helpful information to all Shorthorn breeders whether they are novice breeders or experienced ones. As many of you know I, along with my wife Sue, own Whispering Hills Farm (WHF) and started the Heritage Shorthorn Society (www.heritageshorthorn.org) in a quest to create more interest and genetic diversity in Heritage Shorthorns. Because I constantly receive inquiries about our Heritage Shorthorns I am going to add a picture of one member of our herd to each issue to hopefully highlight the merits of Heritage Shorthorns and why I strongly believe Heritage Shorthorns can compete economically with the hyped up Modern Shorthorns.

WHF Heritage Shorthorn cow: Whisper Beatrice She is a 4 year old that weighs about 1550# and is sired by Boa Kae Royal Oak. She is pictured with her daughter Whisper Cotton (2 days old) who is sired by Spiro.

Quarterly Topic: Shorthorns: What is in a name?

When I started my Shorthorn herd many years ago I did not understand the differences in the types of Shorthorns and the terminology that was used to describe them both historically and today. For some readers parts of this article will be redundant but for most I believe I can clarify what type of Shorthorn is characterized by a particular name. I will take a chronological approach as I discuss Shorthorns in the 1790's versus Shorthorns today.

Teeswater and Durham Shorthorns:

Initially Shorthorns started as a landrace which means that they were bred to fit a particular localized environment and market. The first Shorthorns were developed in the Tees River Valley which was in the Teeswater District of Durham County, England. They were referred to as Teeswater or Durham cattle. Eventually the descriptive term Shorthorn was added.

Shorthorns Versus Longhorns

Historically there were Longhorn cattle in England prior to 1800. They differed from the typical Longhorns associated with Texas today. Naturally the term Shorthorn emerged as cattle with shorter, curved horns became more popular during the late 18th century.

Scottish Shorthorns:

Scottish Shorthorns can be described as "beefy" beef Shorthorns. The famous Scottish Shorthorn breeder, Amos Cruickshank, was the real pioneer in the development of this type of Shorthorn. Many Scottish Shorthorns were imported into both the USA and Canada from Scotland in both the 19th and 20th century. The term "Scottish topped" emerged which simply means that the sire on a pedigree is a Scottish Shorthorn.

Dual Purpose Shorthorns:

I debated with myself where to insert the term Dual Purpose because it essentially goes back to the origins of Shorthorns when great cattle breeders took sides debating the merits of various Shorthorn bloodlines. Perhaps the most iconic statement about the emerging duopoly in Shorthorns was “Bates for the pail and Booth for the butcher”. In one sense this statement encapsulates both the versatility and uniqueness of Shorthorns from the day they were developed. Dual Purpose Shorthorns are simply Shorthorns that can be used for efficient production of both milk and beef. Shorthorns rose to fame around the world as they became family cows, milk cows, beef cows, and oxen. No other breed of cattle can match the diverse capabilities of the Shorthorn breed.

Beef Shorthorns:

Beef Shorthorns are as described phenotypically. This term is used in many countries around the world including Australia and the UK. There was some discussion in the USA to use this term but it never came to fruition. Instead the more generic word Shorthorn was used.

Polled Shorthorns:

All Polled Shorthorns trace to a single polled cow in Minnesota in the 1890's. Her offspring became the foundation of hornless or Polled Shorthorns that were eventually incorporated into the American Shorthorn Herd Book in 1923.

Dairy Shorthorns:

The term Dairy Shorthorn is used in many countries instead of Milking Shorthorns because it is thought to be more descriptive and defining. When Shorthorn breeders in the USA met in 1920 to form a dedicated group to oversee Shorthorns there was much debate about the term milking versus dairy. In retrospect if Dairy would have been used it may have propelled this type of Shorthorn to the forefront of the Dairy Industry instead of being buried by Holsteins and Jerseys today. Unfortunately the term “milkers” became a derogatory term used by many Shorthorn breeders to heap scorn on this type of Shorthorn.

Milking Shorthorns:

At the meeting in 1920 Milking Shorthorn emerged as the name for this type of Shorthorn. Milking Shorthorn is also used in Africa and Australia. When the split within the USA Shorthorn organization between the beef and dairy enthusiasts occurred in 1948 the American Milking Shorthorn Society came into existence and persists until today.

Modern Shorthorns (Beef Type):

Almost all beef type Shorthorns today, except Heritage Beef Shorthorns, are essentially an amalgamation of other beef breeds with varying degrees of purity. Most Beef Shorthorn breed registries around the world acknowledge this fact within their registries either through grade up or percentage programs. Certainly Beef Shorthorns, as constituted today, dominate the breed numbers in most countries relative to Dairy or Milking types.

Modern Shorthorns (Milking Type):

When the upgrade program was instigated at the American Milking Shorthorn Society in 1945 the definition of a Milking Shorthorn instantly changed with the resultant dilution of the breed. Today Modern Milking Shorthorns are often mostly Red and White Holsteins with a smattering of other breeds including Shorthorns. The term Milking Shorthorn is actually a misnomer because the Shorthorn part has gradually been replaced with other types of dairy cattle-thus the "Modern" title. This fact can be found on the AMSS website by viewing the complicated percentage rules that apply when trying to register an animal.

Native Shorthorns:

AMSS started their Native program in 1998 to recognize Shorthorns which had their complete parentage trace entirely back to the 1822 Coates Herd Book. It was an opportunity for Shorthorn breeders to capitalize on their dedication and investment to maintain breed purity. Societal changes have resulted in the term Native becoming a pariah.

Durham Red:

The Durham Red classification of Shorthorns was designated by ASA to create marketing opportunities in commercial markets utilizing the red color seen in Shorthorns. Durham Reds must be at least 25% Shorthorn up to 75% with the rest Red Angus. The term Durham Red has really never "caught on" even though it was initially heavily promoted.

Shorthorn Plus:

The American Shorthorn Association has embraced a new type of Shorthorn crossbred called Shorthorn Plus. To qualify as a Shorthorn Plus an animal only has to be 25% Shorthorn. The other 75% of the animal could be Galloway, Devon, Dutch Belted, Angus, etc. These animals can be upgraded to purebred status over time by breeding them to purebred Shorthorns. The only caveat is that no percentage Shorthorn Plus is eligible to be upgraded to purebred status, as defined by ASA, if they are black or partially black. The term Shorthorn Plus is a great marketing ploy but the reality is they are nothing but a bunch of crossbreds.

Heritage Shorthorns:

The name Heritage Shorthorn first appeared in 2015 as a way to encompass all Shorthorns (Dual Purpose, Beef, and Dairy) that trace their ancestry only to the 1822 Coates Herd Book. All Native Shorthorns are Heritage Shorthorns but the term Native has fallen out of favor because of its linkage with many negative connotations in today's society. As the heritage livestock movement has ballooned, associating Heritage Shorthorns with it has created tremendous new marketing opportunities for Heritage Shorthorn breeders and eliminated the negativity surrounding the usage of the word native.

Conclusion:

Hopefully I have successfully explained the nomenclature used to describe various types of Shorthorns around the world. As new technology continues to emerge in the cattle industry the terms that will ultimately dominate are composite beef and composite dairy cattle. There is no stopping this train so I believe it is extremely important for Shorthorn breeders en masse to comprehend what is different about their cattle through terminology, phenotype, and genotype.

Topic For Next Issue: Corn Versus Grass

