

## Why Are Heritage Shorthorns Becoming Popular Again Around The World?

### Farm Update:

So far we have had a more normal winter weather wise although it has been colder with one ice storm which always causes a lot of difficulties. Unfortunately that has resulted in the consumption of more high priced hay but hopefully it will balance out over the rest of the winter. It is a long ways till spring.

### History:

Because Shorthorns were the dominant cattle breed in the world for many decades starting in the 1850's it is important to recognize that they were completely different animals compared to what is being bred/promoted by most Shorthorn breeders today. In previous Shorthorn Bulletins I have detailed many of the changes that have occurred within the Shorthorn breed and why today's Shorthorn is almost literally a "cow of a different color". Unfortunately both the American Shorthorn Association (ASA) and the American Milking Shorthorn Society (AMSS) continue to move more toward a "show model" for the breed because they have nothing to offer the commercial cattleman or dairyman. Without the show market both ASA or AMSS might not exist today, which is why both ASA and AMSS are putting so much money and time into youth shows and activities. They are trying to attract a certain demographic: parents who will spend any amount of money to help their child win a trophy, which obviously benefits high end Show breeders. The addition of Shorthorn Pluses doubled the number of trophies in Shorthorn shows, and now with multiple National Shows, the availability of trophies has started to resemble Little League where everyone gets a trophy just for participating. Not only that but in some shows Shorthorns are competing directly with Shorthorn Pluses, further confusing onlookers when they see red, white, and roan Shorthorns intermingled with "black Shorthorns" in the show ring with "black Shorthorns" sometimes winning.

### Poor Branding;

Brand promotion has always been a problem for the term "Native Shorthorn". It is lamentable that AMSS chose the term "Native" when they started a process in 1988 to define pure Shorthorns versus crossbreed Shorthorns because the term "native" generally has a different connotation for the general public. When you have people asking if Indians developed this breed one knows confusion reigns. The other problem is that by directly tying the term native directly to Milking Shorthorns a stigma developed in the sense that other Shorthorn breeders thought that "Native Shorthorns" were all Milking Shorthorns. The derogatory term "Milkers" soon was fostered on them and this resulted in the belief that they had nothing to offer the commercial cattle breeder other than milk. Of course nothing could be further from the truth but names matter when selling a product. If AMSS had set up a separate breed society and registry these problems could have been avoided. When the term Heritage came into use, instead of embracing it, AMSS decided to plough ahead with the Native term not recognizing that the term Heritage has tremendous gravitas and can be linked to a growing segment of the livestock industry.

## What Has Been Lost:

Shorthorn's place in the history of cattle was forever established in the early 1800's by the the founding efforts of Bates and Booth who developed and enhanced their traits while showing Shorthorn's versatility. Unfortunately much has changed as Shorthorns lost their predominance in the world because of the parochial approach to the breed by ASA and AMSS. To use a trite statement "Bates and Booth must be turning over in their graves". The pursuit of money rather than probity has consigned many livestock breeds to the dust pile of history. Fortunately Shorthorns have shown a resilience that has defied logic. As cross breeding became a staple of the breed the traits that made them a dominant landrace became diluted by an ongoing push to come up with something new. Throughout time hucksters have played this card and what we have seen in the Shorthorn breed's recent history is no exception. The reason Shorthorns became the dominant breed of cattle in the world was because they were the complete package and could be used in so many different ways to complement other breeds. That is why they were known as the "universal improver" and were instrumental in the foundation of about forty other cattle breeds. The approach that has been taken by ASA and AMSS is really a reversal since they have systematically polluted Shorthorn genetics by cross breeding. What a loss.

## Renewed Popularity:

When the term "Heritage" was proposed to name traditional Shorthorns, instead of "Native", the whole view of conserving pure Shorthorn genetics changed. Preserving old pure Shorthorn genetics could suddenly become a viable business model and attract a whole different type of potential Shorthorn breeder that could take advantage of the name change. Embarking on a new path for success utilizing the unique traits of the Heritage Shorthorn breed, and eschewing the "show model", current Heritage Shorthorn breeders are now engaged in bringing pure Shorthorn genetics back to life with new aspirations to take advantage of the evolving Heritage livestock movement. What has been somewhat surprising is the growing interest in older Shorthorn genetics in other parts of the world especially Canada. Whether it be genetic defects such as double muscling or a lack of vigor/hardiness many Modern Shorthorn breeders are beginning to realize that there is a better alternative ie: Heritage Shorthorns. In that sense Heritage Shorthorns have almost become a separate cattle breed. It has been said that the "unadulterated FULLBLOOD genetics of all breeds will be the most valuable commodity in the coming years". Anyone in the Shorthorn breed that adheres to that mantra is starting to reap the benefits both monetarily and in personal satisfaction.

## Heritage Shorthorn Society:

With the advent of the Heritage Shorthorn Society (HSS) in 2018 there suddenly was a "gathering site" for pure Shorthorn genetic enthusiasts. It provides not only a focus point for Heritage Shorthorn breeders but catalogs a wealth of information about Shorthorns that never existed before on one website. Much of this was accomplished through the efforts of Dr. Bert Moore (who provided much of the historical information that was eventually incorporated into a book he cowrote "Shorthorn And the American Cattle Industry"), and through the selfless

efforts of an all-volunteer staff and financial donations from many HSS members. It is fair to say that the HSS website is now the most complete Shorthorn informational website in the world. As a result a true picture of the Shorthorn breed is available to anyone who goes to the HSS website and spends the time to review the information that is posted. HSS allows small Shorthorn breeders to promote their Shorthorns for a nominal fee and get “their name lights” in front of a targeted audience. They could never do that before. With the addition of a registry focused only the utilization of traditional pure Shorthorn genetics, and not on show Shorthorns, Heritage Shorthorn breeders can easily and inexpensively document the lineages of their Shorthorns. All of the aforementioned benefits of HSS have been recognized by Shorthorn breeders around the world and have renewed their interest in Shorthorns that are not simply a “bunch of show cattle”.

#### Long Term Prospects:

Rightly one may ask where are Heritage Shorthorns headed and will they have long term relevance in the cattle industry. In one sense that is a very difficult question to answer because no one truly knows where the cattle industry itself is headed. Will it even exist in fifty years if environmental groups continue to push their almost religious belief that modern meat production is one of the largest contributors to climate change. Some countries such as Sweden and Denmark are already contemplating banning meat produced through conventional methods believing instead that plant based or cell cultured meat is the future. Taxes on meat production and/or increasing regulations may be the backdoor method used to essentially ban meat production. Ruminating on the future of the cattle industry can be depressing but speculation can not be a substitute for moving forward. The reality is Heritage Shorthorns have a bright future because of their ability to fill so many niches beyond the show cattle industry. The opportunities page on the HSS website ([www.heritage-shorthorn.org](http://www.heritage-shorthorn.org)) delineates many of them. As more nouveau cattle breeders seize on these opportunities the uniqueness of the Heritage Shorthorn cattle breed will become further entrenched in the minds of both cattle breeders and the general public. The insular existence of Heritage Shorthorns has been obliterated as they are now front and center around the world through the efforts of HSS in preserving, promoting, and helping to produce these amazing cattle. The only limiting factor to their continuing increase in popularity will be the timidity of cattle breeders to embrace their possibilities, and to promote their many desirable qualities.

Future Topic: Epigenetics And How It Might Be Changing The Shorthorn Breed