

# Bittersweet Farms

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lying idle. "I always like horses and cattle together," she explained. So she decided to become a seed-stock producer.

After spending time researching the various beef breeds, Maara discovered Salers while in her native Canada. Salers have been bred to forage on native grasses in miles of rocky terrain. The mountain cattle are used for labor as well as valued for their milk and beef.

The first fullblood Salers bull, Vaillant, was imported to Canada in 1972, and its semen was distributed throughout North America.

Research into the breed sold Maara on the breed, and she purchased three mature cows and nine heifers over a six-month period for seed stock. Of these, one cow was Princess Blue 74P, a cow which since has produced eight class winners and grand and reserve grand champions.

Currently Bittersweet Farms has the largest Salers herd in Pennsylvania with 75 fullblood (100%), purebred (93.75%), and crossbred animals.

## Calving ease a top trait

There were many characteristics that sold Maara and Hamilton on Salers. Primary among these is the breed's calving ease. "We haven't had to pull a calf from a Salers, and this year we've had a 100 percent calf rate," Hamilton reported proudly. "A Salers calf has a low birth weight, and it is just like a string bean: long and skinny."

Much of the calving ease comes from the Salers dam's large pelvic area and her birth canal's downward slope.

Once born, the calf is up and suckling, usually within a half hour. From that point on rate of gain is high, producing heavier weaning weights than many other breeds.

Another plus for the Salers is their early maturation and high fertility. Females conceive and breed back quickly, and bulls can cover more females than other breeds, according to Hamilton.

Salers are good foragers, often covering a 40-mile area. "They're good on the range, which is important," Hamilton said. "They'll eat anything. In the winter they can feed on hay without any loss in weight."

Salers aficionados also claim that because females can convert any type of grass into high levels of butterfat, calves grow faster and better than other beef breeds.

The cattle do well in feedlots as well, being put on the rail at 12 to 14 months with weights ranging from 1,150 to 1,400 pounds.

Packers like a Salers carcass because of its leanness, which consumers currently are demanding from their beef. "A Salers has won the carcass class at the Denver National Western Show the past seven out of eight years," Hamilton noted. "The meat is 50 percent leaner than that of an Angus-Hereford cross. Salers meat has only 1/4-inch backfat."

The U.S. Olympic Committee is sold on Salers meat as well, giving it their endorsement. They particularly were impressed by the beef's leanness.

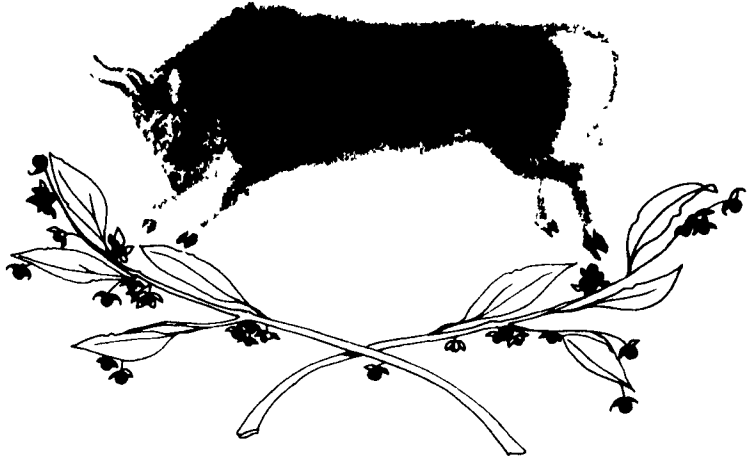
## Top traits transfer

Other positive Salers characteristics include heavy bones and hooves, good coat, resistance to diseases including pink eye, high tolerance to temperature extremes, and an easy disposition. To top this all, these traits are passed on in crosses. And Salers cross females are non-terminal, which allows farmers to improve their herd rather than dilute it.

When asked if there were any undesirable qualities in a Salers,



Princess Blue is one of Bittersweet's original Salers cows. A champion herself, she has produced eight class winners and grand and reserve grand champions.



## Bittersweet Farms Inc.

Hamilton responded, "I haven't found any yet. They're efficient foragers, good calf raisers, weigh off heavier calves on just grass, breed and calve easily, and have lean meat. We wanted an easy-keeping cow, and we have it. A Salers is a balanced breed."

When Maara began building her herd, she started with females that would represent different types of beef cattle traits such as depth and length. "We started our own gene pool, if you will," she observed. "I thought if we had three family lines representative of different traits, our customers would have a choice."

For instance, if a farmer needed to add depth to his animals, he could purchase Salers with that trait.

Maara developed her herd mostly through embryo transfers (ETs) with Holstein cows as recipients. Although Holsteins don't do well on the range in winter, Maara and Hamilton opted to use them because of their availability.

"We're moving away from Holsteins, though," Hamilton remarked. "Holsteins aren't easy keepers. Their feed bills in winter are too high." After weaning this year, Hamilton plans to sell off all Holstein cows and use Salers or crossbred beef breeds.

Bittersweet Farms have had more than 100 ETs in the past three years, born mostly from January to March and in September.

Although Hamilton and his assistant, Mick Scrafford, are present when the cows calve, they don't have to help the Salers dams. Holsteins on the other hand, may need help pulling the calf out. Once the calf is born, it is tagged, weighed, measured, and tattooed. Every morning the cattle are herded into a corral where the calves are separated out. At this point Hamilton and Mick can check the health and progress of the young calves, but mostly they use the time to halter break the animals. Also during this time, in the first half of the year, the cows and

heifers are clipped and checked for heat.

## Salers seed stock

Bittersweet Farms is a seed-stock operation for the Salers, and their animals go about half and half to purebred and commercial herds. "We're not able to hold onto bulls more than 14 to 15 months," stated Hamilton. "They're in demand now because of the Salers' low birth weight. And because the market is strong in bulls now, we can afford to keep the females until the market comes around."

## Salers add pounds

In commercial crosses Salers will add pounds at weaning time and produce an animal that converts feed well. This means less money invested in the animal before slaughter.

In a cross, the Salers also will

contribute hybrid vigor, well-shaped pelvic area on the females, lower birth weight in calves, fertility, and good carcass performance.

Bittersweet Farms has produced many winning Salers, having had a grand and reserve grand champion female and bull for every year they have been showing. They've sold bulls from Florida to Oregon and from Maine to California and had many repeat buyers.

"I talked to guys who've said their best females have come from our herd," recalled Hamilton. "It makes me happy to hear that. It lets you know you're doing something right."

With acres of healthy Salers of all ages and championship animals year after year, it is obvious that Bittersweet Farms is a winner in the seed stock business.

## National Dairy Board Recognized For Advertising Effectiveness

ARLINGTON, VA — A National Dairy Board advertisement directed toward physicians has won a prestigious award in the medical print advertising field.

The Board was the recipient of a Special Award for Significant Achievement presented by Modern Medicine at its 15th Annual Aesculapius Awards in New York. Modern Medicine, a clinical journal reaching over 120,000 primary care physicians nationwide has presented the awards, named for the Greek god of medicine, for 15 years.

This year marks the first time that a nonmedical or nonpharmaceutical ad has earned recognition, according to Bernard Rogers, publisher of Modern Medicine. "The National Dairy Board's effective advertisement for dairy calcium received an extremely high physician interest score. The Board's innovative marketing plan to reach physicians in a clinical journal environment, which is traditionally dominated by pharmaceutical marketers, demon-

strated unique foresight and expertise. It was a plan that proved tremendously successful as our reader interest studies showed."

In acknowledging the award, National Dairy Board CEO Joseph Westwater praised the role physicians have played in helping to communicate the importance of dairy calcium to their patients. Westwater also gave credit to American dairy farmers for having the foresight to invest in effective promotion, nutrition and product research which has resulted not only in program accolades, but in significant dairy consumption increase.

The National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, composed of 36 dairy farmers, was established by The Dairy and Tobacco Adjustment Act of 1983 to develop and administer a coordinated program of promotion, research and nutrition education to strengthen the dairy industry position in the marketplace. This effort is financed by America's dairy farmers.



Diane deN Maara, owner of Bittersweet Farms, has been raising champion Salers since 1984. Her herd currently numbers 60 Salers fullblood, purebred, and crosses.



Miss Bittersweet 10W, a January 1987 purebred, was named champion Salers female at the Iowa Beef Exposition. The heifer brought \$2,800 from Feemster Farms in Indiana.