

# Santa Gertrudis Cattle Have The Hardiness, Flavor, Leanness

(Continued from Page A1)

bucks," said Gene.

For years the Mooses have been trying to convince beef producers and retailers otherwise. They've been trying to help educate the producer, retailer, and consumer about the advantages other types of beef have, particularly the Santa Gertrudis cattle.

Gene, with wife Linda, daughter Sue and her husband Doug White operate a 90-brood cow purebred and commercial beef farm a few miles south of Gettysburg. Their 400-acre Chapel-Ridge Farm also finishes and prepares about 20 head of freezer beef per year using specially fed Santa Gertrudis crossbreds.

A purebred Santa Gertrudis is premium for their freezer beef operation, according to Gene, because it tastes better, with improved marbling, better leanness, and better palatability.

However, the diverse Chapel-Ridge Farm (in the Santa Gertrudis business since 1981) knows the importance, in these tough economic times, of diversity. In addition to their purebred and finishing cattle farm, Chapel-Ridge also sells special round bale carrier/stacker equipment.

Overall, what's most important to the Mooses is helping to educate the buyer and the public about the greatness of the Santa Gertrudis cattle.

## Develop breed

Santa Gertrudis are made up of  $\frac{1}{2}$  Milking Shorthorn and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Brahman. At the turn of the century, the King Ranch, near Kingsville in southwest Texas, was trying to develop a breed that was hardy and could withstand the severe weather patterns (from severe cold, to drought, to flooding rains) which hampered the survivability of the known breeds of cattle. After they crossed the Shorthorns with the Brahman cattle,

they let them loose for an entire year — and to their surprise, not only did the cattle survive, but they thrived and reproduced.

According to Linda Moose, the ranchers, who wanted to keep the breed closed and market them on their own, found out that not only were the cattle alive, but they had calves that were weaning off at half their mother's weight. The mothers "were as mean as a snake," said Linda, "but they had protected their babies, gotten themselves bred, had a calf unassisted, protected the calves from predators. . . and had enough milk to wean the baby off at half the mother's weight.

"And that's what any of us are looking for in a cow," she said.

## Looked down

For years, beef buyers have looked down upon the Santa Gertrudis because of the navel flap, which tends to hang low, and the characteristic horns. Today's Santa Gertrudis cattle come polled and horned, according to Linda.

"In the Santa Gertrudis breed, the one thing that the commercial cattleman has been afraid of was horns," said Gene. "Another thing was the large navel flaps (a Brahman influence)." Breeders of the cattle are making great strides in cleaning up the underline.

The marketing of Santa Gertrudis in this country was dealt a bit of a setback years ago, after about 1910, when the breed was developed. Sometime between 1910 and 1940, several bulls "got out" of the King Ranch, according to Linda. Before that time, the cattle were known as "the rich man's cow," said Linda, "because only rich people could afford them." But now, the cattle are priced nearly equal to other beef.

Far too many considered the Santa Gertrudis a southern cow that would not be able to withstand the cruel northern temperature



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extremes, mostly because few had experience with them, according to Linda. Also, the northern farmers didn't have the thousands of acres to allow free-roaming cattle as they did in the Midwest and Southwest. But the cattle are viable for the breeders because they will do well in northern climates.

## Loaded up

A woman by the name of Helen Groves, a lady whose families had ties to the King ranch, purchased Buck Doe Run Ranch in Coatesville to house Santa Gertrudis cattle. Santa Gertrudis were loaded up using helicopters and cattle cars, prodded with electric sticks, and set loose.

All trouble broke loose when these free-roaming range cattle, who had never known a fence or any kind of confinement, nor had they dealt with human beings on foot, were allowed in the fields.

"They went straight through fences, and they went straight over people, they went through barns, and they got a reputation of being wild, mean animals," said Linda.

But because beef producers know how important it is to treat an animal right, feed it, and acclimate it to the conditions of the farm, the

Santa Gertrudis (which became an official breed in 1940) thrived.

## Treat them right

Linda said Chapel-Ridge Farm's cattle "are better than a lot of the European breeds," she said. "Because if you treat them right, they become pets. They're the gentlest creatures you'll ever find. But if you hurt them, they will remember it and they will get you."

Gene said, "They'll eat out of your pocket. But if you get to hootin' and hollerin' at them, and start clubbing 'em, I'll guarantee they'll hurt you. They will get you. They'll gang up and get you."

Linda said the cattle's gentleness and their calving ease, together with their rate of gain and feed-to-meat conversion, make them highly marketable. The calf "is built right and the cow is built right to have an easy calving," said Linda.

Some characteristics of the breed are the narrow shoulders and head of the calves, in addition to the wide pelvic area to the cows. Linda also said, "when that calf hits the ground, it's small." The calf is weaned off, by their projections, at half the mother's weight — if not, the cow is culled to make

way for better stock.

## Raised naturally

She said the cattle they process for freezer beef are raised naturally. "We do not feed them any antibiotics — none of our animals get any steroids or growth stimulants. We feel we have the natural growth stimulants that we need within our breed, that we don't need to use any implants of any kind."

Also, Chapel-Ridge doesn't castrate the bulls. They believe when bulls are castrated, it takes away their natural growth hormones, and the trauma will keep them from finishing as quickly and as well as they are capable of, according to Linda.

"We're continuously bringing in new bulls and new bloodlines to maintain our purebred sales," said Gene.

The finishing cattle are fed a special total mixed rations comprised of hay, speltz (a Russian form of wheat), oats, soybean meal, minerals, and molasses. The grain feed is used instead of grazing to keep out the garlic-like, grassy taste common to feeder animals put on pasture.

(Turn to Page A35)



A comparison of conventional fatty crossbred beef, bottom photo, and Santa Gertrudis purebred beef, top photo. The Santa Gertrudis beef tastes better, with improved marbling, better leanness, and better palatability.