

Shaggy, Docile Highlands Provide Excellent Beef

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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) —

Someday, if you're near the Mount Zion area, turn right onto Union Road from Freeport. Within a mile, look up the gently sloping hill to the left and you might notice some of the most unique and attractive beef animals to be found — the Scotch Highland.

The cattles' telltale long horns, shaggy coat, long lashes and forelocks, and overall weather-rugged appearance make them stand out. But look beneath all this, into some of the breed characteristics that cattle farmers enjoy, and you may be in for a treat.

"They're such *beautiful* animals," said Larry Wyles. Together with his wife Phyllis, they manage a small but successful herd of Scotch Highland cattle on Winding Creeks Farm. "They're easy to handle, they resist diseases, they calve easily, they need no shelter. I never put them in a barn."

Wyles has raised a wide array of beef animals, but has studied the Highland breed intensely. Since 1986, he has bred the cattle with many others — including Angus, Hereford, Santa Gertrudis, and Charolais — and admits that the crosses "grow fantastically."

According to the American Highland Cattle Association (formerly the American Scotch Highland Cattle Association), the animals lived for centuries in the rugged remote Scottish Highlands. The extremely harsh conditions created a process of natural selection, with two distinct classes: the

slightly smaller and usually black Kyloc, whose primary domain was the islands off the west coast of northern Scotland, and the larger, reddish animal, home in the remote Highlands of Scotland. The Scotch Highland are the oldest registered breed of cattle, according to the Association, with the first herdbook established in 1884.

The "weather hardiness" of the cattle allow them to be kept in all sorts of extremes, including snow or cold weather. They have been raised in Alaska and Scandinavian countries, according to the Association. And the cattle can roam on less than ideal pasture and thrive.

Scotch Highland beef is lean, well-marbled, and flavorful, with little outside waste fat (the Highland is insulated by long hair rather than a thick layer of fat). In the British Isles, according to the Association, Scotch Highland beef is recognized as the finest available and fetches premium prices. The British royal family keeps a large herd of the cattle at Balmoral Castle, near Braemar, Scotland, and considers them their beef animal of choice.

Interest in the breed is escalating (the recent Keystone International Livestock Expo in Harrisburg featured a successful show and sale of Highland cattle).

But what's more important to Wyles are the "mothering traits" of the Highland cattle that will mean effective cost savings in terms of survivability and hardiness. These traits carry over into the finished cattle, and could ring up feed savings since all the High-



The Wyles also raise other animals on Winding Creeks Farm, including llamas, miniature donkeys, and miniature horses. Here, Phyllis Wyles shows off the miniature horse, "Sundance."

lands eat is hay and open pasture. (Weaned calves are fed a mineral/vitamin mix.)

Although the cattle will take additional time to reach the market (about two years), they'll finish inexpensively and will provide lean carcass quality.

One of the characteristics breeders have had in years back is the slow growth of the animals. But the pace has been picked up, and now they finish a lot sooner than they used to through selection.

For the cow/calf producer, other important considerations are the calving ability.

"They calve easily," said Wyles. "The calves have a small head and small shoulders when they're born. Even the young heifers have absolutely no problems as far as calving."

When finished, the carcass yields a lean meat. Although they have a heavy sheath, the carcass itself "is real good," said Wyles. "I've eaten it, certainly, and it's excellent meat. It'll get the marbeling without the fatness on it."

In the past, many producers have shied away from bringing the breed in to the calving operation or have kept from using them as finished cattle because of the long hair, which tends to be deceptive to some, and the horns, according to Wyles. But the cattle can easily be dehorned, and the additional hair does not affect overall meat quality.

Wyles has sold Scotch Highland



Larry Wyles takes the 5-year-old Highland bull, "Gollath," by the horns. "They're a real gentle animal," said Wyles. "They're very docile. They're easy to be around. They have sort of a scary look to them, but they're really just the opposite of that."

cattle in the past for 4-H projects, because they "can be trained easily, and lead easily," said Wyles. "They're a real gentle animal. They're very docile. They're easy to be around. They have sort of a scary look to them, but they're really just the opposite of that. And they come in all colors."

Wyles said he has worked with a great deal of different types of cattle on the farm, including Holstein, Angus, Charolais, Herefords, Brahmans, and others in the past 20 years, since moving to the farm in 1972. Wyles, who works as a guidance counselor at the Elco

Middle School, and who farmed as a child in Saxton, Bedford County, said he enjoys working with the unusual cattle.

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"I like the unusual," he said. "I just really got tired of raising the regular-type beef animal. I wanted something that, when I looked out the window and when I walked into the field, they would just . . . well, for me, be gorgeous to look at. They're fantastic cattle."

Seedsmen Annual Meeting Set

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Members of the Pennsylvania Seedsmen's Association will meet on Thursday, December 16, here at the Eden Resort Inn.

Guest speaker is Greg Wickham, director of business redesign for Agway, Inc. Wickham is directing a major effort to modernize the agriculture division of Agway's business. He will speak about the changing agriculture in the Northeast and the effect of these changes on crop need suppliers.

Another guest speaker is William Brubaker, executive secretary, Pennsylvania Agronomic Products Association. Brubaker is going to bring members up to date on the progress of the certified crop advisor program and updates to the nutrient management program.

Reservations are (\$20.00 per person) and must be mailed by December 10, to: Fred Mohr, Seedway Inc., 980 Loucks Mill Rd., York, PA 17402.



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