

Miniature Cows Attract Attention

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff

GORDONVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — The cute little cattle grazing in the meadows of Aaron J. Fisher, Intercourse, and at his brother-in-law Amos Esch's Rocky Ridge Miniature Farm in Gap catch the attention of passers-by.

But the Amish relatives aren't raising miniature Kentshires and Covingtonshires for people

merely to admire their "cuteness." Instead, they believe that the miniature breeds will become more and more in demand as the answer for more efficient natural resource usage.

"People want them for pets, show, breeding, beef, and milking," Fisher said. "They're easy to handle, don't require much space and feed, and are something new and cute."

About two years ago, Fisher,



Covingtonshire is a breed engineered from a triple cross combination, which were developed from breeding miniature Angus to miniature Kentshires. The Kentshires are miniature Herefords bred with Miniature Irish Dexter. Full-grown miniature cattle measure between 42 and 45 inches and weigh between 800-900 pounds.



Five-year-old Keith Beiler finds these miniature breeds just the right size for a pet. Keith is a neighbor of the Fishers.

his dad, and Esch saw an advertisement about miniature Kentshires being raised in Washington state. After checking it out, they became so excited about the miniature breeds potential that they each purchased two. The prospect of being the first in the area is also exciting to Fisher.

He said that Washington state is where "things get started." He believes that when two separate and distinct purebreeds are crossed, the results are an animal with hybrid vigor outstanding to either of the parent breeds.

From the Kentshire stock,

Rocky Ridge got the idea to genetically engineer a composite breed.

"Now we have four little Covingtonshires," Esch said of the breed that ranges from total black color to black with a white face.

The idea for the Covingtonshire breed materialized when Esch was talking with a member of the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society. The name Covingtonshire was already in the registry, but they needed someone to blaze the trail and to use a triple cross combination in breeding. Esch was advised that since he had some of the nicest Kentshires, all he needed to do was have them bred to a miniature lowline Angus bull.

According to Fisher, full grown miniature cattle weight 800-900-pounds and are between 42 and 45 inches in height. If they grow to be 48-inches or more, they are no longer considered miniatures. They must exhibit desirable breed characteristics and not dwarf defects.

A primary reason for developing the breed is in response to beef industry changes. Few consumers want 8-12 ounce steaks. A 4-6 ounce steak, low in cholesterol, lean, yet tender is wanted. Certified Covingtonshire beef will be available from the small carcass animals.

The secret is in the small muscle cell structure. Fisher explained that larger animals have striated muscle cell structure, which needs lots of fat or marbelizing to tenderize the steak.

Minature breeds mature at 13-16 months of age compared to standard-size breeds that require 18-24 months. The early

maturing combined with the shorter cellular structure contribute to a more naturally tender product.

According to Fisher, there are 17 miniature breeds out of the more than 250 breeds of cattle in the world. He's convinced the interest in miniature cattle will continue to increase.

Miniature cattle appear a bit fatter and wider than that of a partially grown breed of comparative height.

Although the sales hype is to promote a beefy breed, the Amish brothers admit they haven't tasted the meat.

"We are raising them to sell as breeding stock," Fisher said. "I think the breed will appeal to people who don't have much land. All you need is one acre for two."

In the winter, the miniature breeds are fed only hay.

Fisher's miniatures graze in the meadow with his horse and pygmy goats, which are used to keep the grass down in the meadow.

Fisher foresees that people who could not otherwise raise livestock because of limited acreage will want to buy a miniature breed as a pet or for a family milk cow and good-tasting beef calves. At this point, the animals sell between \$3,000 and \$5,000 each, which is cheaper than Angus miniatures, which sell between \$8,000 and \$10,000 each.

Fisher said that he is not aware of any susceptible health problems with the miniature breeds.

Small cattle breeds are easier on the land, equipment, and facilities.

Large cattle requires almost constant attention to fencing and barn repairs. Miniature cattle weigh less and their hooves are smaller, so they can't do much damage even if they tried to escape.

"We're just feeling our way through," Fisher said. Some embryo work is tentatively planned. Semen is imported from the Angus Association in Washington state because only a few select bulls are acceptable for breed registration.

For literature and more information, write to Rocky Ridge Miniature Farm, 109 Cambridge Rd., Gap, PA 17527.



Fisher said the primary reason for developing the miniature breeds is in response to beef industry needs for a smaller, more tender steak. But he and his brother-in-law are raising Kentshire and Covingtonshire for breeding stock. Fisher said the miniature animals appeal to people who have only an acre or two of land and want to raise them for pets, for family milk supply, or for beef. Smaller breeds are easier on land, equipment, and facilities.



OMESTEAD NOTES

