

Braunvieh Genetics Contribute To Beef, Dairy Breeds

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If you can speak a little German, perhaps you'll be able to correctly pronounce "Braunvieh," or "brown cow," when you refer to the smoky-shaded cattle associated with the Swiss Alps.

According to information from the Braunvieh.com website, Braunvieh is not a crossbreed or even a composite breed. This pure breed makes up roughly 40% of the Switzerland cattle

herd and has spread throughout the world.

These smoky-brown cattle have a light-colored muzzle and poll while their shoulders and neck tend to be darker. They may also have a dorsal stripe. The calves are born very light and darken with age.

A group of 130 Braunvieh were imported to America in the late 1800s and are actually the basis for the development of the American Brown Swiss dairy

breed. In 1984, for the first time since the 1800s, a Nebraskan who had been in Switzerland looking for Simmental cattle was impressed by the Braunvieh and imported more original Swiss Braunvieh.

Lately, in the 1990s, several frozen embryos of original Braunviehs have been imported from Switzerland.

According to Braunvieh.com information, the breed's coat is sleek and fine in warm weather

and will become heavy in colder weather which enables the Braunviehs to adjust to different environments. They prove their adaptability by residing in countries such as Mexico to India to heights of Venezuela to the reaches of the Arctic Circle in Canada.

In the late 1960s, in order to increase milk production, Switzerland began importing American Brown Swiss semen to use on the native Braunviehs. As a re-

sult the majority of the Braunvieh cattle in Switzerland as well as other European countries today have been crossed with Brown Swiss.

The Braunvieh Association of America was organized and incorporated in 1984. For more information, the Braunvieh home page is <http://www.braunvieh.com/index.html> or the Braunvieh Association of America's home page at <http://www.braunvieh.org>.

In And Out Of The Show Ring, Braunviehs Perform For Ennis Family

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FORT COLLINS, NY — Lamont and Leigh Ann Ennis, of L & L Cattle Company in North Collins, New York, are enthusiastic about the breed. The couple sold their dairy and began to manage a 140-cow Angus operation plus begin to build their own Braunvieh herd.

Currently they own about 20 fullblood Braunvieh. A fullblood is an animal that is completely Braunvieh. An animal can "breed up," however, to a purebred status. Ten of the Ennis' fullblood animals are embryo transfer calves. In addition the couple owns three Angus cows bred to Braunvieh bulls and one crossbred cow used as a recipient.

A newspaper in Alabama sparked the couple's interest in the breed.

"We were hauling registered cattle in Alabama and I happened to pick up a newspaper that had a spread about Braunvieh," said Leigh Ann. "What interested us was that they're well noted for their carcass characteristics and large ribeye and that they marble easily without a lot of back fat. They can grade Choice but only have 2/10 inch of back fat."

Out west, in the fed steer contests, the Braunvieh have consistently done well, noted Leigh Ann. On that same trip in December 1997 the couple stopped at a farm to check out the breed and were impressed with the thickness, muscle shape, and look of the breed.

They bought a percentage cow (an animal less than 50% Braunvieh) with a heifer calf and in January 1998 bought their first fullblood animal from Denver, Colorado. The breed fits nicely into the beef industry, according to Leigh Ann.

"They have a lot of muscle expression, meat, and thickness

the cattle industry," said Leigh Ann. While brown is considered a fullblood animal, 50 percent or more Braunvieh is considered registerable. A heifer must be 7/8 Braunvieh to be considered purebred, and a bull must be 15/16 Braunvieh to be considered purebred.

"Because of that (the percent-



The Ennis family bought Flori at a production sale in Oklahoma. She is bred to calve this fall.

wherever they need it," said Leigh Ann. "Also, if you breed a brown Braunvieh to a black bull, you'll get a black calf. That's important for the current marketing situation."

Although a shaded gray is the traditional color of Braunvieh, the breed is changing color.

"The Braunvieh are turning black according to the trend in

ages) you can breed up to purebred status," explained Leigh Ann. "It's more marketable. Black is bringing a premium because of the belief that black is quality. New York has a lot of small producers that market through sale barns and they've learned that black calves sell better."

"We got into it (Braunvieh



Braunvieh calves are born lighter but will darken with age. Misty, from L & L Cattle Co., was a 1999 heifer.

breeding) because there's a need for the kind of animal in the beef industry that can grade Choice and not be fat, a breed that's cost-efficient, that you don't have to feed forever. If we didn't think Braunvieh could fill that need, we wouldn't be in the business."

Not everybody needs a fullblood product, said Leigh Ann. "I think some of the best beef comes from crossbreds which take advantage of that hybrid vigor."

However the Braunvieh, believes Leigh Ann, could make important contributions to the genetic pool of tomorrow's cattle.

"I see them as infiltrating crossbreed programs or the composite breeds out West, or having a place in a good crossbreeding program," said Leigh Ann.

"One thing that we noticed is that you sacrifice material characteristics with breeding for carcass quality, such as the heifers are hard to get bred, or there's not much milk left. In the Braunvieh, which started as a multi-purpose breed, these characteristics are not sacrificed."

The couple uses embryo sales as a different, practical way to market Braunvieh genetics.

"It's easier to send breeders in Texas an embryo than a whole heifer," notes Leigh Ann. "It's much easier to look at a pedigreed

than for someone to come the whole way up to look at an animal."

"There's a pretty big market for Braunvieh embryos. There's not as many opportunities to buy the animals, and embryos can be shipped in a tank UPS." The couple plans to stay small and produce quality animals to con-

sign to major Braunvieh sales each year.

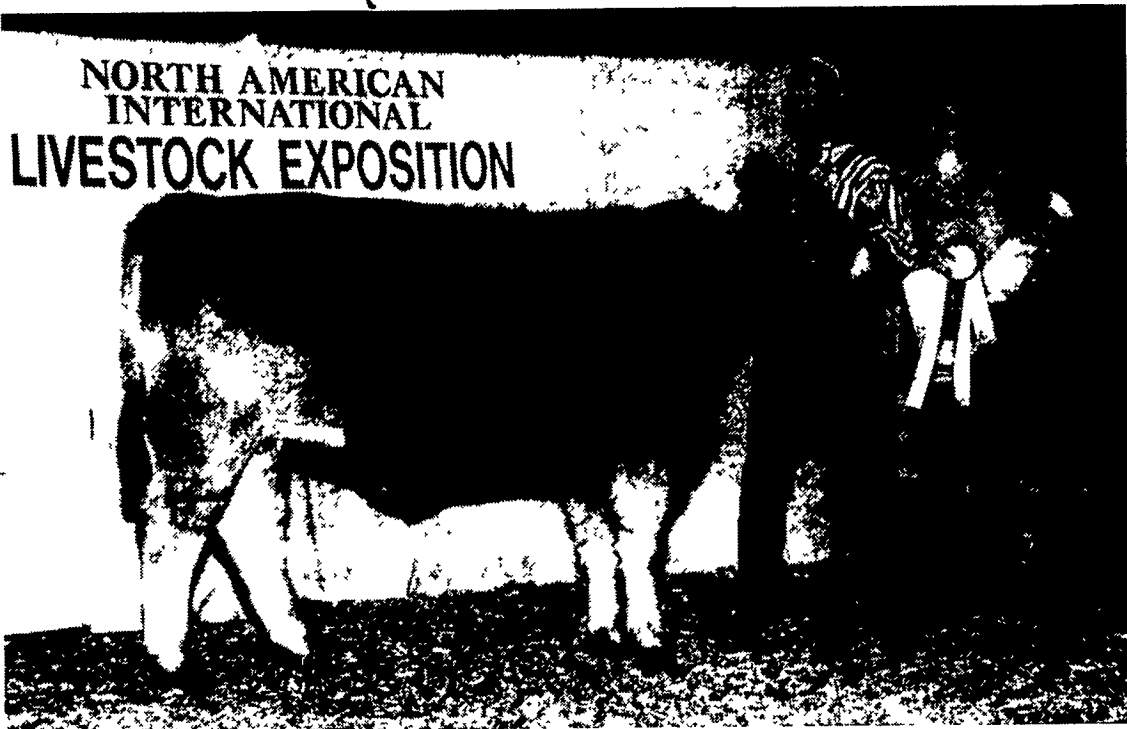
They flush three main donor cows then freeze and sell the embryos before breeding the donor cows back for live calves. Currently they are considering shifting their market toward selling frozen embryos for locations reasons, as most fullblood Braunvieh are in the west or southwest.

"We were choosy when we bought females, to make sure they were donor quality to get the core group of donor females to work from," said Leigh Ann, who says that they cull hard, also.

"We send our embryos to Colorado and get back weaned calves," said Leigh Ann. "Purebred dairies are doing that because they don't like feeding recipients all the time. If they don't cycle they stand open until the next time and you're feeding them and not getting anything from her."

“We got into it (Braunvieh breeding) because there’s a need for the kind of animal in the beef industry that can grade Choice and not be fat, a breed that’s cost-efficient, that you don’t have to feed forever. If we didn’t think Braunvieh could fill that need, we wouldn’t be in the business.”

Leigh Ann Ennis



The Braunvieh cattle, from Switzerland, have made their mark on dairy and beef breeds. Lamont and Leigh Ann Ennis of L & L Cattle Co., along with their year-old daughter, Sierra, raise and sell the adaptable animals. The Braunvieh in the picture, Veronica, was reserve grand champion female at the Braunvieh show at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in 1999 and will appear in show rings again this year. NAILE, which will be under way from 4-17, is the world's largest purebred livestock show, with more than 20,000 entries in eight livestock divisions.