

Longhorn Crossbreeding to Result in 'Beef' Breed



These are Longhorn cows to be used in the Gelbvieh/Longhorn synthetic-breed project.

Since his first venture into the Texas Longhorn industry B.J. "Red" McCombs has been an innovator with the breed. When he began in 1978, McCombs became an enthusiast of the Longhorn bull and has since raised some of the top herdsires of the industry. But today McCombs, along with as many as 10 other breeders, is starting a venture to create a synthetic breed.

The desired result will be a registered beef breed that will be $\frac{3}{8}$ Longhorn and $\frac{5}{8}$ Gelbvieh, says Alan Sparger, owner of Texas Cattle Services and manager of McCombs Longhorn projects.

"The intent of creating a new breed is not to create another high-dollar, high-price breed," says Sparger. "It is a breed that will have market appeal to the commercial cattleman."

Recently, the McCombs' Longhorn herds were removed from Colorado and taken to ranches in Texas in an effort to consolidate the herd and advance marketing strategies, says Sparger. The herd's top half will go into a continuing breeding project to strengthen the straight Longhorn herd, while the remainder will be part of the synthetic breed project.

"We want to produce cow families that are predictable," says Sparger about the straight-Longhorn breeding program. "It's a little bit different than what most breeders are doing."

A lot of study will go into the pedigrees and bloodlines of the Longhorns used in the straight-breeding project, Sparger says, adding that it will have a heavy emphasis on line breeding.

The Longhorn project is unique to the McCombs herd, but Sparger stresses the new breed plan is open to anybody interested in making the commitment. The preliminary $\frac{1}{2}$ Longhorn and $\frac{1}{2}$ Gelbvieh cattle are expected to be calved during the early summer and about 500 registered Longhorn cows are being used. However, only 150 of those cows belong to McCombs.

"This is an effort that is not just Red McCombs. We have invited people to join us," says Sparger, who himself has cows involved in the project.

The only requirements organizers have created are four guidelines to aid potential breeders. For the first cross, breeders must use registered Gelbvieh bulls, says Sparger. They must also have recorded weaning and yearling weights on all half-blood females and these females are subject to registration. Finally, breeders will be given marketing and promotion information.

The goal of the synthetic-breed project is to produce lean beef cattle that will finish fast.

"We should be able to take them right off the cow, feed them 100 to 120 days and go to slaughter," Sparger says.

Beef processing plants are looking for carcass weights closer to 450 pounds, rather than the traditional 600-pound carcass, he says. The key for project organizers was to find a breed to complement the Longhorn and that was how the selection of the Gelbvieh breed was made.

"Gelbvieh cattle are known for doing

well in the feedlots, and that was one of the major reasons we've chosen them."

As well, Gelbviehs are known for good mothering, being fertile and able to survive in differing climates, Sparger adds. It is hoped that efficiency will be peaked by putting the animals in the feedlot immediately after weaning. The new breed, which has yet to be named, will be solid red and the market targeted wants a carcass weighing about 900 pounds, Sparger says.

"We're just trying to make an efficient machine that doesn't lose the benefits of Longhorns," Sparger says.

A minimum of five years will be required for "meaningful results," but the half-blood animals will say an "awful lot," he says.

In the breed-creating process, registered half-blood females will be bred to straight Longhorn bulls. That will create a cross-bred animal that is $\frac{3}{4}$ Longhorn and $\frac{1}{4}$ Gelbvieh. The final cross will be a straight Gelbvieh bull on a $\frac{3}{4}$ Longhorn cow, producing the new breed.

Organizers of the project hoped to have preliminary registration done through the TLBAA and the group's proposal was accepted by the Association during the February board of directors meeting.

"The market we are trying to hit will be the top end of the commercial cattle market. We want them viewed only as a registered commercial breed."

Naturally-polled bulls will be used in some of the breed construction and eventually Sparger believes the new breed may be a polled breed.

"We will be attempting to raise some naturally-polled cattle," he says.

Cow's weights will be somewhat lighter than exotic-breed weights. Sparger estimates mature weights of between 1,000 and 1,200 pounds.

"The thrust of the breed project will be in fall 1988."

Hopefully, Sparger says, the first generation of building toward the new breed will be on display during the fall sale at McCombs' Ranch in Johnson City, Tex., during the annual sale there. During the sale McCombs will also sponsor a heifer futurity that is open to all members of the TLBAA. As well, McCombs will be hosting the STLA youth show at his Fiesta sale in early May.