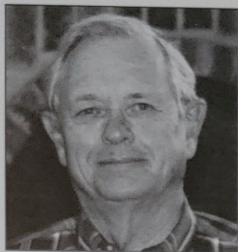


# Bulls, Bulls Everywhere

(and nary a bull to breed)

By Bill Anthony

*Breeders of Texas Longhorn cattle are great people. I have enjoyed tremendously my 25 or so years of raising Longhorns, and have been privileged to make some wonderful, lifelong friendships throughout the industry. Active participation in Texas Longhorn organizations has also enabled me to visit many ranches and view thousands of Longhorn cattle all across the country. While I have seen quite a few excellent breeding programs and breeders who are truly seeking to improve their herds, I never cease to be amazed at what I see so many breeders using for herd sires, and the the bull calves they are saving as future sires...*



It's quite possible that our associations have done a poor job educating new Longhorn breeders in the area of sire selection. Or maybe we believe too much in the "buyer beware" philosophy, and have been so eager to make a buck that we promote and sell anything with testicles as a herd sire. This has often proven to be true in regard to our cull and barren females. We have a tendency to try to pass our junk on to some unsuspecting and naive person rather than send that junk where it belongs—the slaughterhouse.

I will never forget my first purchase at a Texas Longhorn auction sale. She was a beautiful, very long-horned cow, highly touted by the auctioneer as one of the best. She was announced as being bred, and came from whom I thought to be a reputable breeder. I couldn't wait for her calf to be born, since I knew it would be an exceptional one.

Months went by, and nothing happened. After about six months I called the vet over to check her out. He told me that not only was she not bred, she could not even have a calf and that it had been several years since she last calved. Does this sound familiar to you? I never again bought an animal wearing that breeder's brand.

For some reason we seem to feel that every calf we raise is an animal that should be kept to perpetuate the breed. Inferior females are bad enough—but fortunately, they can only have one calf at a time. One poor-quality bull can put 30 or 40 equally inferior calves on the ground every year. Does it not concern us as breeders that we are intentionally (or ignorantly) breeding inferiority into

our breed? I imagine you've heard a breeder say something like "He's not much, but I can sell him to somebody, at least as a heifer bull." Or maybe you've said this yourself.

Let me share an actual experience with you. For several years I enjoyed a very good Longhorn bull market, selling to commercial breeders in my area. Then two South Texas breeders started delivering their runts, culls and 500-pound long-yearling bulls to these same breeders for about half the money I was getting for my bulls. Some of those commercial breeders came back to us after a couple of disastrous years, but many just declared all Longhorn bulls to be worthless and found themselves another breed.

I'm sure these two Longhorn breeders thought they had really cut a fat hog by selling a couple of potloads of useless bulls for real money, but they set the Texas Longhorn breed back 20 years in my area by doing so. We need to steer at least 75% of our bulls, then scrutinize the remainder very closely before selling them to *anyone* as breeding bulls. We'll be doing ourselves and the Texas Longhorn industry a tremendous favor.

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Texas Longhorn breeders might be the *only* cattle breeders who pay \$5,000 for an outstanding female, then take her home and breed her to a \$500 bull. This is "breed preservation" at the lowest level, and "breed improvement" it most definitely is *not*. A great many Longhorn breeders don't mind paying top dollar for a herd-improving female, but get absolutely irate when you quote them \$5,000 for a proven, high quality bull. One really good herd sire will do more, quicker, to increase the quality of your herd than half a dozen good cows.

One of the things that has kept the Texas Longhorn breed in the background of the national cattle industry (e.g., several years behind in most areas) is that we tend to handle our programs opposite of how commercial breeders do. They cut deeply, so to speak, into their bull calf crop, then measure, weigh, then progeny-test the remaining bulls. This way, they *know* when they have raised a herd sire.

On the other hand, we seem to think that

every bull calf out of an outstanding cow—regardless of the quality of the bull she's bred to—is a herd sire prospect. Or worse, we convince ourselves that every calf, even the product of two inferior parents, is worth preserving simply because it meets the qualifications for a Registered Texas Longhorn. Try as she may, a good cow cannot completely overcome being bred to an inferior bull.

It is my opinion that we have precious few really great, proven herd sires in the Longhorn breed—whether you're talking about hobby, historical or beef-type bulls. Those few great ones, and their breeders, should be recognized as such by their fellow breeders and the associations. These breeders should also be rewarded by being allowed to make some money with those bulls. This cannot happen in a national market saturated with marginal-to-inferior Longhorn bulls.

If we would set up, through our associations, guidelines and programs whereby a truly outstanding sire could be universally recognized, we might begin to see more bulls of this quality in the breed. We could base our evaluation on a bull's *performance*, rather than on how much money has been spent promoting him or how many times he impressed an animal scientist standing in a show ring.

If you are raising bull calves that, when mature, will have eight feet of horn and weigh 1200 pounds, please don't try to sell your bulls to a Longhorn breeder who is interested in raising Longhorns for the commercial market. And for heaven's sake don't sell them to a commercial beef breeder who makes his living selling cattle by the pound. The beef man might tell you he only wants "heifer fresheners," but when the calves from your bulls hit the market weighing 200 pounds less than another bull's calves, he won't be back to buy from you next year, and he will badmouth Longhorn bulls to anyone who'll listen.

If you are raising bulls for the beef market that will weigh 2000 pounds at maturity, have 32-inch horns, and produce calves that will be good weight gainers, don't try to sell them to a person wanting into the hobby or historical market. Either way, crossing these market lines is detrimental to the entire Texas Longhorn industry.

Meaningful, worthwhile breed improvement begins with a knife and a knowledgeable, critical eye toward each year's bull calf crop. And it certainly doesn't hurt to know what a good heifer calf is supposed to look like. But if you think that a pedigree tells you all you need to know about a bull, or need a university professor to tell you what a good Texas Longhorn bull looks like, you just might be in the wrong business.

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