

Red Brangus — America's Breed

by Barbara Langham

If you run a commercial cattle herd, you're looking for higher weaning weights, calving ease, more milk production, disease and insect resistance and reduced labor and feed costs. Red Brangus have all these and more.

Red Brangus were developed nearly 71 years ago from purebred Angus and Brahman stock. Red Brangus combine the carcass quality and calving ease of the Angus bloodlines with the hardiness and hustle of the Brahman, but with the red hide most preferred in today's market.

The percentage of Brahman and Angus blood can vary with each registered Red Brangus: $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{8}$ - $\frac{5}{8}$. As a result, you can choose a Red Brangus that best fits your climate. In the South, cattle operators often want a stronger Brahman influence, whereas in the North they want a higher Angus percentage. The half-Angus and half-Brahman seems to suit the Southwest best.

Originally, Red Brangus cattle were concentrated in the Gulf Coast and Southwest regions. Today, however, Red Brangus have spread throughout the United States, Mexico, Central and South American and South Africa. Here's what people say about Red Brangus:

Size



The typical bull weighs 1,800 to 2,000 lb. and the typical cow 1,100 to 1,200 lb. Surprisingly, the calves are usually born small, about 70 to 75 lb., but they gain rapidly.

"When we saw the first calves, we thought they were sick they were so little," says Alton Matthews who operates

a 330-acre farm near Italy, Texas. "But they started growing fast and when we sold them at seven months of age, they weighed 520 to 540 lb.

"The Brahman influence gives you more ear, more pounds, more frame, growthiness," says John Sosnowy, a registered Red Brangus breeder from Cameron, Texas. "Feedlots are looking for ear cattle because they're more efficient gainers."

Higher Weaning Weight

"Cross breeding gives you an automatic kick of 10-15% in weaning weights," says Mike Levi, who runs the Paleface Ranch. "When you keep the heifers and breed them to another good performance tested bull, you add another 15 or 20% to weaning weights. For example, one large operator bought Red Brangus bulls from this ranch and over not too many years has increased his average weaning weights 70 to 90 lb. a year."

Rex Swan, who runs a registered Red Brangus operation near Templeton, California, says, "Out in the western states, a little bit of Brahman ear in crossbred cows is worth at least a four cent a pound of premium."

Range Hardiness

Red Brangus thrive under adverse conditions and can forage long distances for grass and water.

"There have been times when it's been 100 degrees for 60 days straight," says Wesley Wilson, whose ranch is in the Texas hill country. "My black cattle would be under the shade panting and hanging around the water trough, but the Red Brangus are out there eating and gaining weight like they're suppose to."

Val Dalton, who runs commercial and Red Brangus cattle in the tortuous, winding canyons in New Mexico says, "If we get a real cold winter, we'll supplement with protein blocks or, if the snow gets too deep, we put out some hay, but that's all. We're strictly a range operation. Everything stays on the range until it goes to market."



Calving Ease

Red Brangus users never have to worry about pulling a calf. "We've calved out 600 cows in the last three years and have never pulled a calf since we've been using Red Brangus bulls," says Wesley Wilson, who manages his family's commercial herd at Bertram, Texas. "It's cut my labor costs to \$10 a cow a year. I just turn them loose and forget about them."

Red Color

In the development of the Red Brangus breed, selection was made for the red color, a recessive genetic trait. One reason was that red is compatible with the color of Herefords that predominate in the United States.

"Red is prettier in many people's eyes," says Mike Levi, whose father developed the breed. "Not only that, the red coats seem to reflect more of the sun's rays than darker animals, making them more heat tolerant and insects are less attracted to them."

Jack Bolack, who ranches between Gallup and Fence Lake, New Mexico, says, "The color of those calves brings me a penny more a pound and that's important. I went back and bought 20 more Red Brangus bulls and now I'm using them on every cow on the place."

Disease Resistance

Red Brangus bulls transmit a characteristic pigmentation around the eye which almost completely eliminates pinkeye and cancer eye.

Marilyn Coll, who ranches near Roswell, New Mexico, says "Our calves are just gorgeous. They're weaning heavier and seem to be more uniform, more straight-backed and framier than we were getting before. We don't have any eye problems and they're really hardy."

Higher Fertility

"I use one Red Brangus bull for every 30 to 35 cows, where I'd normally use one to 25 with an Angus or Hereford," says Galen Dodson, ranch manager for John Hill's Double L Ranch near Austin, Texas.



And calf percentages are high. In the 24 years that C.E. Scull of La Vernia, Texas, has been using Red Brangus, his average calf crop stays in the high 90s and have even gone as high as 99%.

Early Maturity

Because Red Brangus bulls mature early and reach a hefty size as yearlings, they can go into service well before they're two years old, thus saving a year of feed and overhead costs.

Wesley Wilson bought a Red Brangus bull that weighed 72% of his mother's weight at 9-months. "When he was 11 months old, I started single servicing him with 11 13- and 14-month-old heifers. Out of 11 heifers, I got nine pregnancies in 60 days." And the resulting calves were "exceptionally good".

Likewise, most heifers are ready to breed at 12 to 14 months old. "All my heifers have a baby on the ground when they're 23 to 26 months old," says Wilson.

Better Milking Mothers

People who use Red Brangus heifers say nursing problems are eliminated - well formed udders, no sunburned or spoiled bags.

"So far we haven't had to milk any cow out for a calf," says Galen Dodson. "I think a Red Brangus bull on a Hereford cow produces heifers that are better milking mothers than any other cross."

Wesley Wilson says female calves produced from a Red Brangus cross are superior to their mothers because of their ability to produce a bigger calf as well as "more milk on less groceries. This (1982) has been an exceptionally dry year and my weaning weights dropped only about 15 lb. When I was using Angus bulls, weaning weights dropped 50 to 60 lb. in a dry year."



Good Babysitters

"Red Brangus cows do lots of babysitting," says Galen Dodson. "There'll be one ol' cow with seven or eight calves while the other cows are off eating. They're very protective toward their calves."

Natural Polled Factor

Red Brangus are naturally muley. "Horns are a nuisance. They're dangerous and you can't eat them," says Danny Meyer of the Bernhard Ranch near Fredericksburg, Texas. "You don't have to worry about getting poked or having your fingers mashed when working or penning Red Brangus cattle."

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Longevity

Few breeds can match the average retirement age of Red Brangus.

"My first Red Brangus bull was a really terrific one," says C.E. Scull, possibly the longest continuous user of Red Brangus bulls in a totally commercial operation. "I bought him at three years of age and kept him until he was 12. I finally sold him to the late Harry Thompson at his Cotulla auction for what I paid for him nine years before."

"I've got some old registered Red Brangus cows that are 14 years old and still putting good calves on the ground," says Galen Dodson. "And I plan to keep them another year or two."

Easy to Handle

"Temperament is what we looked at when buying our Red Brangus cattle," says Alton Matthews. "It's paid off because now you can walk among the cattle without disturbing them. I use a 3-wheeled scooter to work the cattle and I can take it right next to them and they don't even raise their heads."



A Working Cattleman's Breed

The goal of the Red Brangus breed is to produce seedstock useful to the commercial cattle industry. The emphasis is on performance not show.

Officially, the breed dates to 1946 when Malcolm Levi of the Paleface Ranch crossed superior cattle of purebred Brahman and Angus breeds and then interbred these crosses. Absolutely no back crossing was done. The American Red Brangus Association, chartered in 1956, drew up the standard of excellence and rules for registry of the breed.

To be registered in the association herd book, a Red Brangus animal must have proof of breeding purity in the foundation Brahman and Angus herds and pass inspection requirements according to standards of beef conformation, size, the polled factor, red color and other vital Red Brangus traits. A certified category has also been established for worthy animals that show an overweighing of either Brahman or Angus characteristics or some other minor factor.

The Red Brangus produced the first Certified Meat Sires with any Brahman breeding in their pedigrees. The CMS program, reported by Performance Registry International, identifies, measures, documents and certifies sires whose progeny demonstrate the ability to grade "choice" within "yield grade 2" at an early age.

"I'm thoroughly convinced that we have the best breed of bull there is for the commercial cattleman," says C.T. Wells of the Triple Creek Ranch at La Vernia, Texas. "The reason to get Red Brangus is dollars at the bank. 🐾"