Lafayette Herd
(Continued From Page 1)

What are these Charolais cattle, and how did they come to Lafayette? A series of articles will answer these questions with information gathered from interviews with cattlemen and from livestock publications.

300-Year Ancestry

The Charolais cattle are a breed developed in the south-central French province of Charolles, at least as long ago as the 17th century.

In appearance they are almost white, small-headed, short-necked, deep-chested, short-legged with straight backs, wide loins, hips and rump. Although extremely powerful and heavy, they are gentle in disposition.

They are distinguished by their hardiness, their ability to adapt themselves to all sorts of climates, their unusual fertility, and their rapid production of high quality meat.

The Charolais were originally triple-threat cattle: the French peasants who developed the breed used them first as draft animals; second for milk, and third for meat.

In northern France they are still used to till the soil; and although they are not usually fed for milking, they give a rich, abundant supply of milk which results in healthier, heavier calves.

In modern France and in the United States, however, Charolais cattle are primarily beef cattle. The animals grow rapidly to a large, well-filled-out shape. The average cow weighs between 1,500 and 1,750 pounds; the average bull is between 2,200 to 2,700 pounds. At least one bull has reached 3,800 pounds, according to the French Charolais society.

A calf with Charolais blood will be much heavier at weaning time than one of the standard, so-called British breeds (Hereford, Aberdeen-Angus). A Charolais cross-bred calf may weigh from 50 to 150 pounds more than a standard breed.

American breeders of part-Charolais cattle report that their calves gain an average of 100 pounds a month after birth, and by 18 months will outweigh any other beef animals by 200 to 300 pounds.

R. C. Myres, a Texas cattlemale, says "we consider the rate of gain per day as the most outstanding characteristic of Charolais cattle."

Not only are these cattle big and fast-growing, they are also said to be economical to raise.

Mr. Myres notes that his ranch for five years has suffered a very low rainfall. "However, our (part-Charolais) cattle have thrived with a minimum of supplemental feed."

A Pennsylvania cattlemale, Morris Cohen, reports that "small amounts of grain plus good pasture or good hay will fatten these animals beyond belief. They are the easiest keepers of any beef animals."

More Profits

Economy does not end on the range. William Jeffery, California cattlemale and beef-research specialist, says the Charolais cattle are far more profitable to the packer and the butcher.

Charolais' part-Charolais cattle dress down a higher percentage of meat than other breeds, and with much less excess fat. The fatter tissues are distributed evenly throughout the lean parts, instead of being "wrapped around" as they are in the standard breeds.

This means that the butcher does not have to cut off a thick slab of waste fat, but the meat itself has the "marbled" quality that pleases gourmets' palates.

As the French Charolais society says, "the flesh is extremely tender, savory, and of a delicacy that can scarcely be matched."

The Charolais produce more meat in the high quality sections - the round, loin and ribs - and less in the low quality plate, brisket and short.

Jeffery has worked out tables of comparative values to show that the packer earns 70.4 per cent more profit on a part-Charolais animal than on a standard breed.

Not only do Charolais produce a great quantity of economical, high-quality meat, but they also have almost ideal breeding characteristics.

The breed is very fecund. Births average over 90 per cent among the cows. A pure Charolais cow exported to Brazil in the 1920's lived for 21 years and raised 17 registered calves.

Factors to be considered in judging the breeding qualities of a species are the ability to reproduce in kind, the potency of bull, calving ability, disease and insect resistance, ability to withstand extremes of temperature, rustling ability necessary for foraging over wide areas during bad range conditions, etc.

Can't Be Beat

"In all these factors, individually or together, we have found Charolais and part-Charolais animals to be away ahead of the field - the race isn't even close," says Mr. Myres. "No other breed or crossbreed can approach the performance of the Charolais."

"Raising methods used by the French are very simple and lead to great sturdiness," the French society declares. "The calves are born in the spring, and as soon as the weather permits they are led to open pasture with their mothers. They are weaned at about six months old and fed in the meadows except in the worst days of winter. Living freely in the open and covering all weather conditions, Charolais cattle have acquired in the course of centuries a hardiness that cannot be matched. Their white coats afford them with splendid resistance against changes of weather and against excessive temperatures."

A Texas rancher, Walter L. Goldston, says that the Charolais breed was ideally suited to the Gulf Coast climate. Although the animals do not have the sweat glands of the Brahman cattle, their white coats keep them relatively cool in the heat. Crossbreed Charolais and Brahman cattle - the Charbray breed - have both white coats and sweat glands.

Yet the cattle also do well in the harsh climates of northern America. Cohen says his part-Charolais withstand the 20-below weather on his Pennsylvania farm better than his Aberdeen-Angus and Hereford cattle. They develop a heavy, curly white coat rather like sheep and stay out in the snow without harm.

A Wyoming rancher, Clinton S. Ferris, says his part-Charolais do better than his Herefords on his 7,500-foot high ranch. "We find that the part-Charolais are more resistant to disease and stand the wind and cold better. In addition they're better rustlers," Ferris states. "They will go up in the rocks and further away from water for food. We hope to prove from nature tests that the part-Charolais eat less per pound of gain than do the Herefords."

Newcomers to U. S.

There have been Charolais and part-Charolais in the United States only since the '90's. Already they have won such epithets as the "Finest Cattle on Earth," and the "Silver Cattle with a Golden Future."

Brother Auguste invites anyone interested to inspect the herd of this remarkable breed at the De la Salle school grounds.

There are 44 cows, 17 bulls and 15 calves present, with an official governmental valuation of over one million dollars.

As Herb T. Hawthorne, Texas cattlemale, puts it, "truly these cattle have golden blood."

(Next: Value of Charolais to the cattlemale industry)