Corriente cattle hardy and horned

By DICK WRIGHT

Advocate staff writer

Joe Hebert is sold on Corriente cattle. A novelty to most people in Louisiana, maybe even to most cattle owners, Corrientes fit, Hebert's own belief in self-sufficiency.

Corrientes are an old breed, tough against the elements and able to scrap for their food, Hebert said. They are favored by rodeo owners and cattle ropers for their stamina and their strong set of horns.

The Corrientes are pastured by the century-old bungalow where Joe and Grace Hebert, a son and Hebert's father live near Carencro.

Corrientes aren't likely to displace today's beef cattle any time soon, but Hebert says, "I really believe some day there will be feed lots of Corrientes because of low fat in the meat."

Today's Corrientes usually originate in Mexico. They are believed to be direct descendants of cattle the Spanish brought to the New World 500 years ago. The name means simply "common cattle" in contrast to beefier "improved" breeds. The North American Corriente Association says the breed almost disappeared as cattlemen improved herds with modern beef breeds.

Hebert said he believes Corrientes and longhorns, another old western breed, are close cousins.

Compared to today's heavy breeds, Corrientes are lightweight, somewhat bony, of many colors — and they have horns.

Many cattlemen today don't want horned cattle. "A horn causes bruising at the trough," Hollis Chapman, beef cattle specialist in the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service at LSU, said.

"It also allows cows to set up a social structure relative to obtaining feed," he said.

Corriente buyers prize horns. The breed's size, stamina and horns make them choice for roping and bulldogging.

"The steers are bought by rodeo arena owners, or some individuals who practice to go into the big rodeos," Hebert said.

Bulldoggers — people who throw steers by grabbing the horns and twisting the animals' necks — like the strong horn base, Hebert said. The horns don't break easily, he said.

"We sell about 50 head a year," Hebert said.

"We sell females to a lot of people who are non-ropers. They just want to get into the business of raising Corrientes," he said.

Hebert read about Corriente cattle in Western Horseman magazine in 1988. The article described a breed that could survive practically on its own.

"I knew this was what I wanted," he said.

He bought three crossbred heifers and a purebred bull from a Texas ranch. It was winter, the cattle were skinny. Hebert said he remarked at the time he hoped they would live until he could get them back to Louisiana.

Hebert's father, a retired dairy farmer in his 80s, took a look at the scrawny cattle, asked what they cost, and said, "Well, son, fools are not all dead."

But the cattle survived. The elder Hebert decided, "There is nothing in the world to kill those creatures."

Anyone interested in more information about Corriente cattle may call Hebert at (318) 896-6082.

They also may get information by calling the North American Corriente Association at (303) 770-0144.