Lafayette Cattle Herd Contains Key To Preserving Pure Charolais Blood

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of three articles on the million-dollar herd of Charolais cattle pastured on the De la Salle Normal school grounds on Breaux Bridge highway. The articles concern themselves with information about the unique animals and not with the legal aspects centering about the entry of the animals into the United States. The first article discussed the characteristics of the Charolais; today's article discusses the value of the breed to the American cattle industry; the final article tomorrow will trace the history of the cattle from France to Lafayette.

By Bob Boyd
Adviser Staff Reporter
(2nd of a series)

A herd of some 76 purebred Charolais cattle now quarantined near Lafayette could become the nucleus of a multi-million-dollar business for the area and revolutionize the cattle industry in the Western hemisphere.

The heavy, meat-laden animals grazing on the grounds of the Christian Brothers De la Salle Normal School on the Breaux Bridge highway contain the seed on many amazing crosses that would benefit the cattlemen, the meat packers, the retailers and the beef-eating public.

Only a handful of pure Charolais bulls and a few hundred part-Charolais cows exist in America outside of the unique herd near Lafayette. Already these few members of the breed have produced crosses, particularly the Charbray, which have far surpassed the standard beef breeds.

The only full-blooded female Charolais outside of their native France are in the Lafayette herd. Unless pure bulls are mated with these pure cows, there will be no future sires produced with full Charolais blood.

It should be pointed out that the American Charolais Breeders Association does list a number of 'pure' females on its register. Under the rules of the association, however, an animal may be considered 'pure' if it contains at least 15-16ths Charolais blood.

The fact remains, nevertheless, that these cattle are not true (Continued on Page 3, Col. 3)
Charolais from a genetic standpoint, and cannot produce pure Charolais offspring.

Cattlemen say that unless a pure strain is preserved, the virtues of the cross-breeds will gradually become exhausted. Mating cross-breed with cross-breed eventually wears out the strain, and only pure blood can revitalize it.

Already, however, the few pure Charolais bulls in the United States — estimated at 29 outside the Lafayette herd — are growing old.

New Blood Needed

Hari R. Thomas, president of the American Charolais Breeders Association, writes: "We are in need of new blood."

The Texas cattlemen say he has been trying for 14 years to import Charolais to the United States. "These are the heartiest and most remarkable cattle on earth," he observes.

He says he recently went to Washington to see if there might be some way to overcome the government ban on the import of bulls, or even frozen semen, from France. He had no luck, since fear of the dread hoof-and-mouth disease has sealed French cattle off from this country for years.

Thomas also reports the failure of two plans to bring pure Charolais to the United States under the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which is now closed.

Cattlemen say that until there is no possibility of bringing in the disease, the Liowisia Livestock Sanitary Board, called thetry to destroy the Charolais strait will diminish and finally disappear.

Destroy Cattle?

The United States Livestock Sanitary Association recently adopted a resolution asking that top penalties be pressed against Broussard and that the cattle be destroyed.

The resolution declared that the destruction of the cattle is necessary to discourage further illegal movement into the country.

Dr. F. B. Wheeler, state veterinarian and executive secretary of the Louisiana Livestock Sanitary Board, called the entry of the Charolais a "threat to the entire cattle industry."

At least five tests by state and federal experts have shown the Lafayette herd to be free of disease. They were brought into the United States during a period when the border was open.

Thomas, president of the ACBA, writes, "I feel certain that there will be no danger of hoof and mouth disease or fever tick if these cattle are released."

If the Lafayette herd were destroyed, the Charolais blood would eventually die out, unless more could be obtained from France.

If the herd remained alive, how could it affect the American cattle industry?

Vigor of Cross-Breeds

The principle of heterosis — or the increased vigor of cross-breeds — has long been known in agriculture.

Of the several bovine super-Species to be used for food was the Bos Taurus, the European and British breeds. In that area, men were great beef-eaters, and cattle were slaughtered for their flesh.

Men early began to improve their breeds and better beef animals soon emerged. Through hundreds of years of development of the Bos Taurus species, such modern breeds have been produced as our Herefords, Shorthorns and Aberdeen-Angus.

Although these so-called British breeds have probably been developed to their utmost, they are limited in what they can do. The world does not have enough meat, and with only British blood, the livestock industry could probably survive profitably only in certain favored spots.

Another branch of the bovine family, the Bos Indicus, has existed for thousands of years, and much as it is found today in India.

The animals were, however, left to a tough environment of barren lands. The surviving breeds by natural selection will thrive under very harsh conditions.

The Indian cattle were also used as draught animals. The larger and more powerful species were thus favored.

Within the last 50 years, Bos Indicus have been brought to the west. In the Gulf Coast we have the now-familiar Brahman cattle.

Adapted to a hot, dry climate, and possessing sweat glands to keep cool, the Brahman has come to dominate the area cattle industry.

Crossing of Bos Indicus blood with Bos Taurus has produced several improved American breeds. Examples are the Brangus, the Braford and the Santa Gertrudis.

But the most outstanding success has been when the Brahman is crossed with the particular Bos Taurus — the Charolais. The cross-breed, the Charbray, inherits enormous size from both sets of ancestors.

Like its Indian parents it keeps cool and will graze all day in the blazing sun, while British breeds will feed only in the shade or when the sun is low.

Like the British breeds it is chunky, with tender, meaty cuts of beef. The Charolais strain is so potent that cross-breeds very closely resemble pure Charolais.

Charbray calves will bring from two and a half to three cents more per pound at weaning time and will weigh from 90 to 125 pounds more. William Jeffery, hotelman and beef expert who worked out these figures, estimates this at a cash difference of from $20 to $61 per calf, depending on the price of veal.

More Meat, Less Fat

The Charolais and Charbray contain very little excess fat. Thomas notes that it costs about 50 cents to put a pound of tallow on a 33-cent-a-pound steer. When cut off, the tallow will fetch only about five cents a pound.

"Charbray cattle are the answer to maximum economical beef production in this country," says Thomas. "They are rapidly coming to the front as a result of the fact that more attention is being given to the problem of producing a market-meat animal which will dress out a carcass nearest to the consumer's desire — more red meat and less fat."

"By breeding Charbray," Thomas goes on, "greater benefits can be obtained for all concerned: the housewife pays for only the succulent red meat, the packer, wholesaler and retailer benefits by the higher dressing percentage which curtails waste and surpluses, and of course the producer finds a ready acceptance for his cattle which he has raised economically."

Texas rancher Herb J. Hawthorne asks: "Why are Charbray so outstanding? Why do their calves hit the ground and grow as much as 100 pounds per month? Why do they produce more weight in the choice meat sections of the animals — the loins, ribs and complete hindquarters? Why do their hips and shoulders ripple with lean, beef-producing muscles even at top weights? Why should they stand out, unsurpassed, in competition with our older, better known English and Scotch beef breeds?"

The answer, Hawthorne says, lies in the crossing of the Indian Brahman and the French Charolais.

As long as there are purebred bulls, the present lack of pure females outside the Lafayette herd does no harm. Even common cows can be bred up to almost pure Charolais by generations of intrabreeding.

But if the pure cows in the Lafayette herd are lost, there will be no more pure bulls to replace the present sires. And then, gradually, the generations will pass, the Charolais strain will diminish and finally disappear.

(Next: History of the Lafayette Charolais Herd)