Highland Cattle – The Grand Ol' Breed

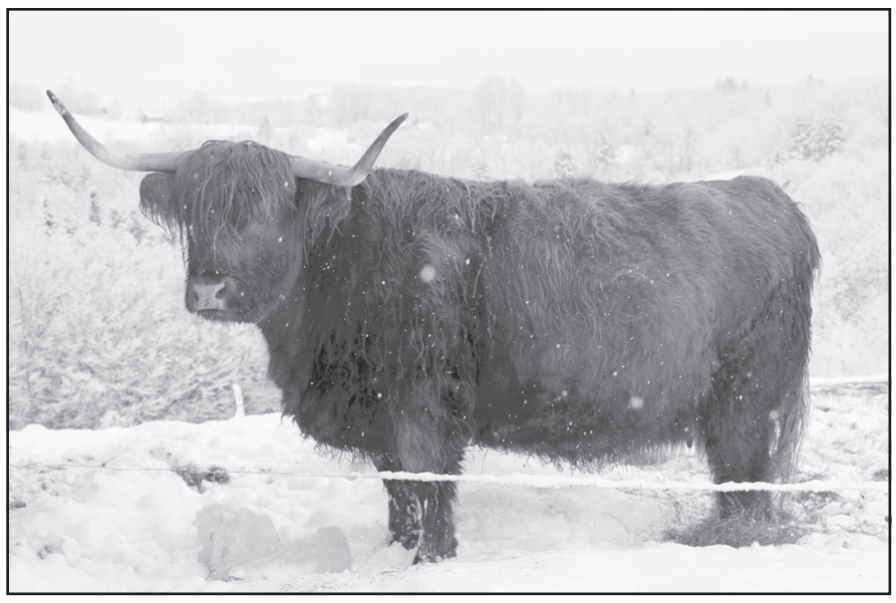
Local Farm Wins (Another) National Award

By TOM HERZIG

Ray Shatney and Janet Steward, who raise Scotch Highland cattle for breeding and grass-fed beef in Plainfield and Greensboro Bend, recently returned home from the National Western Stock Show in Denver, CO with, as is their custom, some prestigious national awards.

The National Western Stock Show is the World Series of cattle shows. Over the years, Ray and Janet have landed just about every Highland prize awarded. Their herd is the oldest closed herd in the USA. Some of its members have appeared on WCAX TV-3 and become local celebrities.

This year, the Produce of Dam competition was won by Shat Acres Cinnamon Raisin upon the judging of her progeny Crimson and Crimson's sister Raisin Brandy. Crimson and her twin sister Clover have been a hit ever since they were brought to the Champlain Valley Fair as calves in 2011 as Twin-1 and Twin-2 and were named in a children's contest.



Cinnamon Raisin 400 - photo Janet Steward

The same year, the Cinnamon Raisin-Crimson-Clover combo was named the National Western Stock Show's Grand Champion Cow/Calf.

"The Denver show is a double-points event," Steward explained. "It appears Shat Acres Raisin Brandy now has a good chance of being named the Role of Excellence Senior Heifer at the American Highland Cattle Association National Convention in June."

Ray's grandchildren Lillie, 16 and Nate 12, the fourth generation of Shatneys to be involved with the herd, participated in the Denver competition. Lillie, who had never shown before, received a 3rd-place Showmanship award.

Distinctive in appearance with their shaggy coats, muppet-like forelocks and wide sweeping horns, Highlanders are very adaptable to climate. Their heritage dates back centuries to the rugged terrain and harsh winters of Scotland. It is thought that their ancestors may have arrived from Scandinavia on Viking ships. "They definitely have a pre-historic quality about them," Steward said. They were introduced to the USA in the early 1900's and are now raised from Alaska to Florida and throughout Canada.

Although "fiercely maternal" as Steward describes, Highlands are docile and fond of attention, especially when it comes to grooming. "They love to be brushed and combed," she said. They are also intelligent and have strong memories.

Cinnamon Bear, a five-time Grand Champion Bull, weighing in at over a ton, nose ring and all, is constrained by a single strand of electric fence after a jolt he's never forgotten.

"I don't know if the ring was a factor at the time, but now Bear won't try to cross the fence with a cow in heat standing on the other side, even if the fence is down," Steward said.

Highlands are efficient browsers, not fussy feeders. Grass-fed is a broad term for them. "They'll clean up brush, scrub raspberries, whatever," Shatney said. "We've pastured them on land that the owner was considering having to bushog. Now you can mow it with a lawnmower."

Shatney and Steward offer breeding stock for sale under the Shat Acres brand. They also market Greenfield Highland grass-fed beef in local outlets, including Hunger Mountain Co-op, the Capital City Farmer's Market, Angeleno's, Kismet, Plainfield Co-op, Capitol Grounds and Vermont Fresh Network.

Highlands are slower to breed than most cattle – 24 to 30 months rather than 15-18 months for Angus or Herefords. They are also slower growing and longer to finish (fatten fully for slaughter). Greenfield Highland beef is grass-fed and grass finished meaning that the cattle are not put on grain to attain maximum weight.

The time factors can be an economic hindrance on the one hand, but in Steward's view and those of her dedicated repeat customers, they are "outweighed" by the quality of the final product.

"These animals are meant to be ruminants," she said. "They're not designed to digest corn or other grains or have hormones and antibiotics added to their diet."

Janet Steward and Ray Shatney - courtesy Greenfield Highland Beef

Highland cattle are protected by their double hair coat which can lessen the need for barns and protective shelter and allows the animals to get by with less insulating fat while producing more protein content than most breeds.

Steward emphasizes that Greenfield Highland beef is leaner than commercial fare, yet has outstanding marbling and flavor. She encourages consumers to conduct their own taste tests. "I'm confident that after you've tried grass-fed Highland beef, you're going to tell me it's the best beef you ever tasted," she said.

Grass-fed beef proponents maintain that when cattle are fed a high-grain diet, the micro-organisms in their digestive system shift

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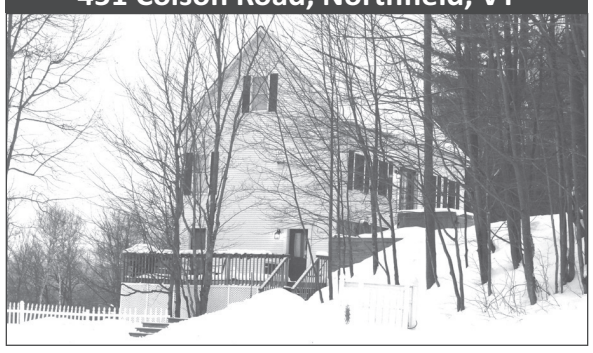

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CENTRAL TO YOUR NEW LIFE

"It was wonderful. The staff - all of them - were helpful and so nice. They really rode out the storm with us. They were great. It was great." While Landon Grant Simard, just a day old, was busy hamming for the camera, his parents Amanda and Tim were simply beaming with pride...and relief! Their first born arrived on Wednesday, February 27 and weighed 7lb/2oz and was 21 inches long. He looks just like his happy daddy. All were ready to go home to Waterbury. We wish them all the best and fully expect they will have lots of laughter and joy in their lives. Good start Landon! YAY!

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