

The cow barn:

Highland cattle for beef

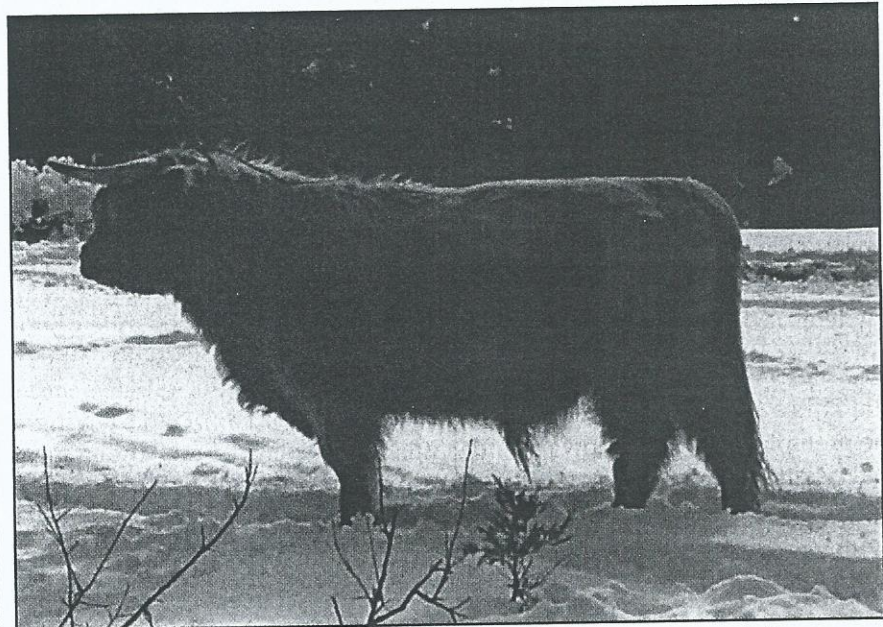
BY GLORIA ASMUSSEN

“As cute as they look, that is as good as they taste.” That statement is something I live by. Raising Highland cattle since 1990 has not only been a passion, but a way of life. Many people don’t know what the Highland breed of cattle is or that they originate from Scotland. I have been asked, “How can you eat them? They are so cute.” Well, they are not just a cute face or a lawn/pasture ornament, they are a true beef animal.

Coming from a dairy farm in my younger years, all I ever knew was how to milk a cow, even though we did butcher Holstein steers each year for our family beef. After I left home I said I would never raise dairy animals, because you have to be there to milk them 24/7. Twenty years later, when I met my husband and we purchased a 250-acre farm in Wisconsin, we decided to purchase animals. My reply was, “No dairy cattle.”

So after researching beef cattle and wanting something different, not the norm, we came upon the Scottish Highland breed. That was in 1989. After renting out our cropland, we just had 40 acres left for our farming endeavor. So we purchased two yearling Scottish Highland heifers in the fall of 1990 and the following spring we purchased our first small fold of five Highlands, including the bull.

We found that the Highlands were very docile, easy to handle and really great foragers. In the spring the older animals would actually rub down the small birch trees we had in the pasture and eat the leaves and any



Highland cattle are docile, great foragers, and can stand a variety of climate conditions.

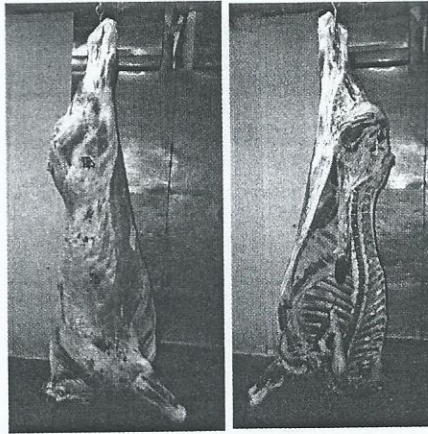
other green brush they could find, especially cedar samplings. They also enjoyed the grass pasture, but they didn’t need the feed that our neighbors were feeding their animals. During the cold harsh Wisconsin winters they needed hay, minerals, and protein. But they didn’t want to go into the barn; instead they would stand against the outside of the barn for a windbreak or go up to the woods.

It was when we moved to Missouri and took the Highlands with us that we saw how versatile the breed is. They acclimated to the hot summer temperatures by shedding their winter hair coat in early spring. By June their hair was short like most other breeds. Some bloodlines would keep more hair on than others and the calves would usually have more hair

also. They keep their dousan (forelock) and the coarse spin hair. As long as they had shade and ponds to stand in, they grazed early mornings and late evenings during the hot summer months and they thrived very well. You will find Highlands in many southern states. There is a regional Highland Association that promotes and educates people on the breed. A free information packet is available to anyone. You can find the website at www.heartlandhighlandcattleassociation.org. The Heartland Highland Cattle Association also has an annual Highland cattle auction sale. Check it out at www.highlandcattleauction.com. This year’s auction is April 23rd, at Norwood Sale Barn, Norwood, Missouri.

It was in 2000 that we finally had raised enough Highlands to be-

gin selling pasture finished beef to friends and neighbors who wanted to purchase some after tasting it. We started to niche market the sale of our beef at different venues and agricultural events as well provided Highland beef to the health food store in our county. That is when we found people wanted to know more about the nutritional facts of the Highland beef. After researching it more we found information compiled years ago from AHCA, Blue Ox Farms, M.A.F.F. and the Scottish agricultural college that the Highland beef is lower in cholesterol than turkey, salmon, pork and shrimp, and lower in fat than chicken, pork loin, and all cuts of commercial beef, and that Highland beef is higher in protein than other beef and even chicken breast. Currently there is a Quality Highland Beef study underway at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, by Dr. Bryon Wiegand, Associate Professor of Meat Science. The study is not complete yet, but the preliminary results show a trend that rises to the top is the tenderness



The beef has a vein marbling and is very lean. This is a great product for the slow cooker as "low and slow" brings out the flavor without adding fat.

of Highland beef. There are very few "tough" samples in the entire data set. These results seem true regardless of the production system. Tenderness traits are moderately heritable and tend to track with cattle of certain genetic origin, with *Bos taurus* (temperate climate) cattle having a greater propensity for tender meat compared with *Bos indicus* (tropical

climate or zebu) cattle. There is also evidence in the literature that aging time postmortem can greatly contribute to tenderness, especially past nine days in the cooler for dry aged intact carcass beef. We also find a positive relationship between increased marbling and increased tenderness. The Highland beef that has been tested seems to buck this last trend in that the fat percentage in most samples is low compared to the industry indicating less marbling, but still producing a tender product. This could prove to be a unique marketing tool for any Highland breeder selling their beef.

I have found that Highlands are cheaper to raise, especially for beef, as they don't require the finishing that many people do with their beef. I make sure they have enough minerals and protein available for them to eat especially in the winter when they are eating hay. During the summer they don't receive minimal protein, but still have loose mineral available. The beef has a vein marbling throughout the ribeye steaks and that also helps with the tenderness. My grass finished beef is very lean. To fry a hamburger, you may need to put some olive oil in the pan so the beef doesn't stick to the pan. I use a slow cooker for my roasts, as they are very tender and tasty cooked that way. For my sirloin tip roasts I use a rub and then wrap them with tin foil and place them in the oven at 250°F and roast to medium rare. Slice the roast thinly and you have a delicious French dip with au jus.

Over the past 15 years I have found more and more health-conscious people who want to purchase natural finished beef, with no additives, no GMO, no grain and no steroids. The customer wants beef that is humanely raised and is out in the pasture leisurely grazing to their heart's content. So as I began this article, I will end it. "As cute as they look, that is as good as they taste." ❁

Gloria Asmussen, Tunas, Missouri, is co-founder and Secretary of the Heartland Highland Cattle Association.

COVINGTON®

1911 - 2015
Pioneers in Mechanical Planting

Since 1911 Covington has made reliable, rugged planters. Contact us for a brochure on our full line of planters and fertilizers or the dealer nearest you.



229-888-2032

WWW.COVINGTONPLANTER.COM

P.O. Box 2, 410 Hodges Ave. Albany, GA 31702