

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN THE USA: HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS

GANADO VACUNO CRIOLLO EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS: HISTORIA Y SITUACION ACTUAL

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SUMMARY

Cattle from the colonial spanish era in the United States persist in small numbers. Spanish cattle were introduced into both the southwest and southeast of the USA during the establishment of spanish missions and private ranches. These southwest and southeast populations were subsequently isolated from one another and evolved into distinct types of cattle.

The southwest population became the Texas Longhorn. Texas Longhorns are well adapted to dry, extensive conditions, with some populations being adapted to the humid conditions of the Gulf Coast. They are small to medium in size and colors vary considerably. The conformation is rangy and fairly poorly muscled, although selection is changing this. The original, traditional type was valued for the longevity and fertility of the cows and was used in rugged environments.

The southeast populations of colonial spanish cattle are only recently being standardized into a breed, named Florida Cracker Cattle. They are smaller and more compactly made than the Texas Longhorn, and have variable colors and horns.

They are well adapted to a humid, subtropical environment. They are valued for longevity, fertility, and resistance to parasites. Historic uses include the production of work oxen for forestry and agricultural purposes, as well as steers for beef and cows for dairy production.

RESUMEN

El ganado bovino de la era colonial española en los Estados Unidos persiste escasamente. Los bovinos españoles fueron introducidos en el SO y SE de USA durante el establecimiento de las misiones españolas y fincas privadas. Estas poblaciones del SO y SE quedaron aisladas unas de otras evolucionando hacia tipos distintos de ganado vacuno.

La población del Sudeste se convirtió en el Longhorn de Texas; estos animales están bien adaptados a las condiciones extensivas, con escasez de agua y algunas poblaciones bien adaptadas a las condiciones húmedas de la Costa del Golfo. Son animales de tamaño pequeño a

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SPONENBERG AND OLSON

medio y su color varía considerablemente. Su conformación es de tipo ambiental, pobremente musculada, aunque la selección está cambiando estas características. El tipo original, tradicional, fue apreciado por la longevidad y fertilidad de las vacas siendo empleado en ambientes difíciles.

La población de ganado español del Sudeste ha sido recientemente estandarizada como raza, llamada Florida Cracker Cattle. Los animales son más pequeños y algo más compactos que el Longhorn de Texas y tienen variables colores y encarnaduras.

Están bien adaptados a un ambiente húmedo y subtropical. Son apreciados por la longevidad, fertilidad y resistencia a los parásitos. Los usos históricos incluyen la producción de bueyes para trabajo con fines agrícolas y forestales así como novillos para carne y vacas para leche.

GENERAL HISTORY OF SPANISH CATTLE IN THE USA

Cattle came to the territory of the present United States of America during the early years of Spanish colonial influence in the New World, (Rouse, 1977). Spanish cattle were originally brought to the Caribbean islands, and from there were brought to the mainland of both North and South America. The origins of these cattle are not known in detail, and are variously stated as being from southern Spain, the Canary Islands, or perhaps even from North Africa. Whatever the ultimate source of these cattle, they were a sample of prebreed cattle that came from the geographic extreme of the distribution of humpless longhorn cattle. They are unique among cattle, and are therefore a very useful, if numerically small, genetic

resource for cattle breeders in North America.

It is thought that fewer than 300 cattle were brought to the New World by the Spanish (Olson, 1988). In light of this small founder population it is remarkable that the derivative Criollo populations contain so many different phenotypic varieties. Upon their arrival the cattle found an environment initially free of devastating diseases and parasites, and the cattle rapidly increased in numbers. These cattle formed an essential part of the extensive livestock production systems that were so characteristic of the Spanish colonies. They were generally left free to fend for themselves, with the excess being gathered as needed.

The populations in North America originally consisted of three groups: California, Texas, and the Southeast. The California cattle were an integral part of the economy of that area before the influx of Anglo settlers in the middle 1800s. Following the discovery of gold and the subsequent massive migration of Anglos to this area the California cattle were eliminated as a distinct strain of cattle. This occurred both from overconsumption as well as from crossbreeding. The end result is that these California cattle are now extinct, and only played a minor historical role in cattle populations.

THE TEXAS LONGHORN

The more central cattle populations occurred in Texas. These cattle came originally from Mexico, and cattle

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

herds from Texas, New Mexico, and northern Mexico interbred and increased to form essentially feral populations of cattle on the plains of Texas (Dobie, 1981; Rouse, 1977 and Towne and Wentworth, 1955). These cattle were raised under extensive management systems. They had endemic diseases such as babesiosis and anaplasmosis which tended to quickly eliminate newly introduced cattle from further north or east. As a result the Texas cattle survived in a relatively uncontaminated situation for longer than did the California cattle. The Spanish cattle from Texas persist to the present day.

The greatest explosion in Texas cattle numbers occurred during the social disruptions of the war between the states (Dobie, 1981). This war occurred in 1860 to 1865, during which time it was difficult to gather cattle. Even when the cattle were successfully gathered it was impossible to safely drive them to market and sell them, and consequently the ungathered herds grew to huge numbers. Following the war these herds were an integral part of the economic recovery of Texas. After the war these cattle began to acquire the name Texas Longhorn, by which name they are known today.

The usual method of exploitation of these vast herds was to occasionally gather them and then to herd them north (Dobie, 1981; Rouse, 1977 and Towne and Wentworth, 1955). In the region of Kansas they were loaded into railroad cars and were taken east for slaughter and processing. This industry gave rise to the long cattle

drives which are now an integral part of the history and mythology of the American West. As the central plains began to undergo development and increased population the newer settlers brought with them eastern cattle, which generally had a northern European ancestry. These introduced cattle rapidly succumbed to babesiosis, which acquired the name *Texas Fever* since the newly introduced cattle contracted the disease following exposure to Texas Longhorn cattle. The Texas Longhorns failed to exhibit signs of the disease due to their contracting the organism early in life. Texas fever eventually closed the lucrative cattle trailing business because the other states passed laws against the trespass of cattle from Texas. This was the first blow to the Texas Longhorn as a breed of cattle.

The second and more severe threat to the Texas Longhorn was the introduction of improved breeds of beef cattle breeds into Texas following the eradication of the tick vector of babesiosis, (Rouse, 1977 and Towne and Wentworth, 1955). Ranchers began to use improved bulls of northern European breeding on the local Texas Longhorn cows, and the introduced types quickly supplanted the pure Texas Longhorn. This process began in the late 1800s and accelerated in the early 1900s until by 1925 or so there were very few pure Texas Longhorns in existence. One fact which is plain in retrospect is that although the initial F1 calves were phenotypically superior to the Texas Longhorn, the contribution of the Texas Longhorn was essential to this

SPONENBERG AND OLSON

expression of hybrid vigor. As is frequently the case, the entire benefit of the cross was assigned to the improved, imported cattle, and the contribution of the local cattle was totally discounted. The result of this attitude was that the Texas Longhorn was viewed as useless, and only after its near extinction was it realized that it had contributed some very valuable characteristics to the crossbred calves.

As is typical of landrace populations, some stubborn traditional breeders always kept the original type of the Texas Longhorn. Most of these breeders began collecting and breeding cattle in the period of the late 1800s up to about 1920. After about 1920 there were very few Texas Longhorns in existence outside of these few isolated herds. These isolated herds therefore became the foundation for the present Texas Longhorn breed.

The foundation herds included those of Cap Yates, who assembled cattle in far West Texas and Northern Mexico. If he found acceptable cattle in Northern Mexico he would simply swim them across the Rio Grande at night, avoiding the complications of a more legal importation along major highways during daylight hours. He had a passion for the very traditional and pure Spanish Texas Longhorn, and worked to keep his herds pure. He valued them for their adaptation to the harsh desert environment of West Texas. He did not crossbreed his Texas Longhorns, and kept them totally separate from his other cattle. He selected bulls from excellent cows, and in this way assured that his line had excellent maternal ability. He

particularly liked old, productive cows that had twisted horns. Longevity, fertility, and twisted horns are still characteristics of this line today.

Further east, on the Gulf Coast, were the herds of the Wright family. They operated a slaughter house, and in the course of moving thousands of head of cattle through the slaughter house they started saving out the Texas Longhorns for breeding in their own herds. This is a slightly different genetic base than the Yates herds, since it involved the rather random and wide sampling of cattle from a larger geographic area. These cattle largely came from the Gulf Coast, or had been shipped in from further north in Texas. Wright cattle are now rare, although they have made an impact on the overall Texas Longhorn breed. They continue to be bred in small numbers by the Wright family.

In the Houston area there were two important family herds. These were the herds of Emil Marks and Milby Butler. Marks started with an old family strain based on local cattle, and continued to use and select this strain. Marks cattle contributed to the overall Texas Longhorn composite, but are now extinct as a distinct strain. Butler worked further east, and assembled cattle from the Gulf Coast and East Texas. He especially liked long horns, and selected for horn length and shape. The result has been cattle that have very long horns, some of which are very twisted but many with plainer horn shapes. The Butler line has been extensively used by a number of breeders due to the

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

horn length of the animals, although the cattle of this line do tend to be smaller than some of the other lines within the Texas Longhorn breed.

Further east in the piner woods of East Texas was the herd of Grady Woods. His herd was assembled from local cattle, and these were from the easternmost geographic extreme of the range of the Texas Longhorn. These were small cattle with very characteristically twisted horns.

A few composite herds (as opposed to the old family strains) were also assembled in the 1920s. These began, more or less, with the official United States program to save the Texas Longhorn from extinction. This had been suggested several times over several years, but only in 1927 did the actual program to save the breed from extinction begin. Graves Peeler was one of the men responsible for the assembling of the cattle for the conservation herd. This is now known as the Wildlife Refuge herd, since it resides at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. Peeler also assembled cattle for himself. A neighbor, Jack Phillips, began a similar program based on some few of his own cattle but also on cattle brought in during this time. These three (Wildlife Refuge, Phillips, and Peeler) are composite lines rather than old family lines. The Wildlife Refuge herd has also had many introductions of Yates line cattle, to the point that these two lines are now fairly closely related.

The Texas Longhorn survived as these eight relatively isolated pockets until the 1960s. At this point the

traditionalist Texas cattle producers began to be interested in these cattle. The increased interest led to improved communication among the breeders, and the prices for the cattle also strengthened. While this acted to save the breed from extinction and to expand its numbers, it also had the curious and perhaps less desirable effect of allowing communication and trading among the foundation herds. It was at this point that the old, foundation, breeders began to trade and sell breeding stock. The end result of this was the loss of some of the distinct foundation lines as they were swallowed up by the resulting composite. Such lines include Marks and Woods, with Wright also nearly being gone, and with Phillips now being much more of a composite than originally.

The movement of the Texas Longhorn from a relatively unselected landrace into a standardized breed has had various consequences for the breed. In the rush to compete in the standardized breed there have been some fads, including color, size, conformation and horn length. All of these fads have changed the breed and all have caused loss of some genetic variants. With the advent of widespread bloodtyping it has also become apparent that some non spanish influence was present in some portions of some of the original lines. Traditionalist breeders have been diligent to use bloodtyping and selection to concentrate on conserving the old, original type. These traditionalist breeders were fairly scarce through the period of rapid

expansion of the breed, but are now becoming more numerous, and will assure the conservation of the unique original genetic resource of the Texas Longhorn is.

The traditional Texas Longhorn is fairly small (cows 300 to 400 kg) and rather rangy in build. Texas Longhorns tend to have long, soundly conformed legs and scant, tapering muscle. There is no tendency to be humped, and the ears are round rather than the pointed ears typical of zebu crossbreeds. The heads tend to be long. Horn shape and size vary, but the most typical have horns that twist upward and outward. Bulls have heavier horns that tend to turn up and forward at the tips. Steers have horn shapes similar to cows, but have much longer horns than do cows. Steers also attain great size with age. Many breeders keep a few old steers around in order to enjoy their large, rangy conformation and extreme horn growth.

Color in the Texas Longhorn varies immensely. Solid colors include red and tan most commonly, but also black, dun, grullo, brown, and brindle. Many of the cattle are born red but then darken to brown or black, with some retaining a lighter dorsal stripe and muzzle. This occurs in both bulls and cows, in contrast to the original color of the Aurochs in which such changes were limited to the bulls. Patterns of white spotting are also variable. These may have been rare in the original cattle, but selection has made them much more common in the present herds. Some breeders select for such patterns, other select against them. The patterns include

the Pinzgauer type of lineback, the colorsided patters, a uniform roan (cárdena type, maybe related to the other roaning pattern), the White Park pattern, recessive piebald spotting, and a facial blaze pattern. In many of these patterns there can be ticking with colored spots in the white areas. Most of these patterns are rare in North America except in cattle of spanish ancestry. Conventional wisdom concerning these patterns is that they were introduced from non spanish sources, but most or all of these patterns are still present (if rarely) in iberian cattle (Sánchez Belda, 1981).

THE FLORIDA CRACKER CATTLE

The third distinct group of spanish cattle in the United States is that from the deep southeast. These cattle are still very much in the form of a landrace, and are only recently being collected and registered as an unique breed. These southeast cattle are variously called Florida Cracker Cattle, Piney Woods, Southern Woods, Florida Native, or Florida Scrub cattle. The process of deciding which cattle to include in the breed and which to exclude from the breed is still ongoing. The organization of breeders of Florida Cracker cattle only began in 1989, although conservation actions preceded this.

The history of Florida Cracker Cattle parallels that of the Texas Longhorn. The original base of these cattle is the spanish cattle that were

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

brought into the southeast of the current United States during the colonization of the area by the Spanish. These cattle were from the West Indies. To the Spanish conquerors the entire southeast of the continent was *La Florida* and included much of the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and the Carolinas, as well as present day Florida.

In 1565 cattle were brought by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés to what is now Northeast Florida (Olson, 1988). In 1640 there are records of prime breeding stock from Cuba coming into the Southeast. Numbers increased dramatically, with as many as 15,000 to 20,000 in south Florida by 1700. The wars between Britain and Spain reduced numbers of cattle periodically, but cattle numbers usually recovered following these conflicts.

The Spanish built a successful cattle industry in the area, both in missions and also in private landholdings (Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 1985; Olson, 1988 and Warner, 1980). The original Spanish influence was widespread, but concentrated in the area of the Florida Panhandle and southern portions of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Following the success of the Spanish in the area, the five civilized tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw) had a thriving cattle industry based on these Spanish cattle. These tribes learned the basics of plantation type agriculture and developed a thriving economy based on large landholdings, slave labor, and excellent Spanish

livestock. One Oconee tribal leader even took the name *Cowkeeper*. Anglo-Saxon settlement of the area occurred beginning in the early 1800s, following displacement of the native tribes, and the cattle industry still thrives on this base of Spanish cattle. All three cultures sequentially used the same type of cattle to develop flourishing cattle industries.

The end uses of Florida cattle were slightly different in the southeast than they were in Texas. In Texas the important uses of cattle were hides and tallow, with beef becoming important only later. In the southeast a very important use of cattle herds was the production of work oxen for agriculture and forestry in addition to the production of beef. This use of the local cattle for oxen continues in some parts of the southeast. Dairying was also more important in the southeast than in Texas.

Various forces, similar to those in Texas, were also working in the southeast to keep the local cattle relatively free from the incursions of genetic material from introduced cattle. In the southeast the endemic cattle diseases were important in eliminating introduced cattle. Many of these diseases (babesiosis, anaplasmosis) prove harmless to calves exposed to them while young, but are devastating to adults newly contacting them. This phenomenon acts to allow the local cattle to thrive while introduced ones rapidly succumb. These diseases, and also the fact that few other types of European cattle were able to tolerate the humid subtropical environment, served to

SPONENBERG AND OLSON

genetically isolate the Florida Cracker Cattle, much as they had acted to isolate the Texas Longhorn.

During the early 1900s, and before, there may have been some incursions of prebreed northern european types into the Cracker Cattle. These are most likely to have been of dairy type from milk cows brought with new settlers from other regions in the USA. Devon cattle, for example, were certainly present in Florida by 1860, (Olson, 1988). In the western portion of the range of the Florida Cracker cattle there were also some importations of french prebreed cattle (Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 1985). Other improved beef types were not introduced into most areas until the 1930s, (Rouse, 1977). This includes zebu types. Until the advent of the zebu the Cracker cattle were relatively safe from incursions into their genetic base, but following this introduction (especially of the American Brahman) the erosion of the humples Cracker type cow was quick and nearly complete. The cross of the zebu onto the spanish cow is remarkable, and has been responsible for the widespread loss of criollo types of cattle throughout the Americas. The spanish cow is herself small, but the crossbred calves were large and fast growing. It was therefore more economically sound to crossbreed than to purebreed the cattle, and the indigenous spanish cow rapidly succumbed to repeated crossing with other introduced types once the disease problems were eliminated. In spite of the repeated possibilities of introduced

genetic material the bloodtyping studies done so far indicate that the Cracker cattle are fairly unique, with most Cracker cattle not having any readily identifiable blood markers from other breeds.

Florida Cracker cattle are similar to other spanish type cattle throughout the Americas. They are generally smaller than other breed types. Cracker cattle are somewhat more compactly built than some of the other spanish strains such as Texas Longhorns. The cows generally are in the 300 to 400 kg range, with some heavier or lighter. A dwarf variant that is rare today was much preferred in the past for some of the more unfavorable coastal environments. This variant went by the name *Guinea* and few such animals are present in the breed today. Muscling is scant to moderate in the breed, which gives them more of a moderate dairy character than a beef character. In strains selected for oxen the muscling can be heavy, but with more masive forequarters than hindquarters. Some few strains are more of a beef conformation. The range of types and the geographic distribution of them suggests that all of the various types are part of the range of variation of a single basic population. The tendency is for the beefier conformation to occur in the north and west extremes of the distribution.

Horn shape, size, and character are highly variable in the Cracker cattle. The horns vary from long and widespread to short and crumpled. Some animals have horns that curve downward instead of the more usual

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

upward sweep. Many pure animals are hornless, and although these polled animals are a minority they are present in many different herds of different strains.

Color of the Florida Cracker Cattle is also variable, since few of the herd owners practiced much selection for color. The solid colors in the breed include a variety of shades of black, red, brown, brindle, and occasionally dun or tan. Many Cracker cattle are white spotted in varying patterns, including linebacked, color sided, or roan. Some are randomly spotted with the recessive piebald pattern, although this pattern is rarer than the other patterns. Some are white with colored ears, eye ringa, nose, feet, and teats (the White Park pattern). Other color patterns occur more rarely, including one characterized by white sides on an otherwise colored animal.

Only a handful of families have kept pure bloodlines of Cracker cattle, and it is from this base that the established breed will be made. These remnants of the once large Florida Cracker Cattle population still occur in the southern portions of Mississippi through Alabama and Georgia, and isolated populations occur in both the panhandle and peninsula of Florida.

The southernmost population of the cattle is those from the Durrence herd near Lake Okeechobee. These numbered some 1800 in 1969 when James Durrence died. Since that time many bulls of other breeds have been used, but a few pure Cracker cattle still persist. Several of these remnants of the once large herd have been donated to the state for maintenance

as a pure genetic resource. Durrence cattle are the major contribution to the state herds, with contributions of Chaires and Tilton cattle in a few of the state herds. Doyle Connor, former Florida State Secretary of Agriculture, is responsible for initiating the conservation efforts which ultimately snowballed into the present broadly supported breed association.

The Tilton cattle originated northeast of Paines Prairie in North Central Florida. The Tilton cattle figure in the state herd at Paines Prairie, but really do not exist any longer as an unique population since the state herds are primarily built on the Durrence line. The situation is similar with the Chaires cattle which have contributed strongly to the state herd at Lake Kissimmee, but this strain no longer exists as an unique population.

The Neal cattle have been assembled by Buddy Neal in the Chipley, Florida area. These are largely from local cattle that *looked right* that were assembled in the late 1960s. While most of the cattle are local in origin there is an influence in the herd from the Okefenokee region, especially through a bull that has been extensively used in the herd. The herd numbered up to 50, but with the recent death of Neal the future of this herd is somewhat uncertain. The death of elderly breeders of isolated pockets of these cattle is a recurring threat to the conservation of this genetic resource.

The Ezell cattle are an old family line that originated slightly north of the Tilton strain. They are being

SPONENBERG AND OLSON

maintained in small numbers by Raymond and John Hamlin near Tallahassee. The herd had been maintained in a nearly feral state by Josh Ezell, Robert's father. These are an interesting population that may be the last remnant of the type that was nonselectively bred in extensive range conditions. Very few of this strain are spotted. This is reputed to have been common in Cracker Cattle originally, especially in south Florida where the nonspotted cattle were held to be more resistant to the environment than were those with white spotting. Since the white spotting patterns of Cracker Cattle are rare in other breed types it is a tendency of most modern herdsmen to practice at least some positive selection for these, and so a totally nonspotted herd is rare today.

Other Florida strains are still coming to the attention of interested breeders. One strain developed by the Crews brothers in the Okefenokee area may still persist in the hands of a few local breeders. There are also persistent rumors of some feral cattle still in the Okefenokee swamp, as there are from some other swamplands in the peninsula of Florida. Another source herd of cattle from northeast Florida is the Wassie Fish herd. These cattle originated from south of the Okefenokee swamp. They are heavier than cattle from further south, which may reflect the more fertile land in the northern areas, but is also consistent with the general trend for heavier cattle in the more northern or western portion of the range of the Florida Cracker cattle. Many of the Fish cattle are yellow, which is due to

selection for lighter animals in the past since they could be more readily seen in the swamps during roundups.

The remaining source herds that have surfaced are all outside of Florida. The Holt line is from Georgia and originated in the Hawkinsville area, although in 1917 or 1918 the old family herd, already 100 years old, was moved to the Okefenokee area. James Holt's father had this sort of cattle, and he has maintained a herd from that base. James clearly remembers traincar loads of cattle coming into the swamp areas from the west during the droughts of the thirties. The imported cattle were all cows, and he never remembers steers or bulls among the hundreds of cattle brought to the southeast in those shipments. Of the cattle introduced into the area only a very, very few survived more than a few months due to endemic diseases and the adverse environment. As a result the local herds received minimal genetic input from the introduction of these western cattle. This was the first major influx of noncracker cattle into the area.

In the days when Holt's father and grandfather had herds of these cattle it was common for breeders to swap bulls back and forth. Later, when few pure herds existed, this practice was stopped and no bulls were introduced into the Holt herd until a white bull was introduced in 1985. This was probably the Barns line bull that came from Carl Williams, another breeder with predominantly Holt line cattle. Such isolation of individual herds is typical of the Cracker cattle herds that survived to the present. In the

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

early days of this century Holt says it was easily possible to distinguish between the herds of the various owners of these Georgia strains, because each preferred a different color or spotting pattern and would select most of the herd to be of a specific variant. This is somewhat in contrast to the more lax selection for color in most other geographic areas. The current Holt herd is mostly black colorsided animals, although some of the Holt cattle in the Williams herds are other colors.

Carl Williams in Pinehunt Georgia bought some original strain Holt cows in the 1970s. In searching for a bull he purchased several out of Florida until he found one with characteristics consistent with those of the original cows. This bull was purchased at auction, so nothing is known of its origin other than he was purchased in the Perry, Florida area. Williams then used this bull on the old cows, saved a bull calf, and used this bull calf on the old cows. By doing this successive times he was able to breed back to the original Holt type in his herd. This technique of using young sons of old cows in succession is very useful in securing the genetic contribution of old cows. Williams has added other typical cattle to the basic Holt type herd. These non Holt cattle include some from the Okefenokee area and a Barnes bull. The Holt influence remains predominant in the herd. With Carl's recent death the future of this herd is uncertain.

A very few cattle persist from a strain maintained by Veltie Poppell in the coastal region of Georgia. These

are small, and are generally red or brindle colored cattle. Currently the strain persists only as cows, and these are in a crossbreeding herd. If the old, original cows can be pulled together as a group this strain may also be able to be saved.

The Barnes line of cattle comes from the border of Alabama and the panhandle of Florida in the vicinity of the Florala. These cattle were kept by Okla Barnes and his father. They had this strain of cattle at least since 1910 and at one point Barnes had up to 500 of these cattle on the open range in southern Alabama. Since 1960 or so the herd only numbered 100 to 150. Barnes died in 1983, but Calvin Eutchins and Noah Oliver both keep the Barnes line going today. Barnes did use polled bulls of his own breeding, and polled cattle were considered as pure as any of the others. Barnes consistently culled any cow that failed to calve annually, and no bulls bred outside the herd had been used since 1910. Calvin Eutchins is actively preserving, the Barnes line with all of its color varieties and types, and the qualities of resistance to the environment built up over the decades. As a method to maintaining the original type he does not deworm the cattle, and keeps careful records on the production of the cows. Several teenagers are in the herd, and he knew of one cow that Barnes had that had calved up until 31 years of age. The Barnes line cattle that remain are interesting since they are of uniform body type, but vary immensely as to presence and shape of horns as well as coat color. Most of these are colorsided,

SPONENBERG AND OLSON

but in recent years the herd is also producing solid colored animals. Such nonspotted animals were reputed to have been in the original Barnes's herd, but have not occurred again until recently. In addition to the patterns considered typical of Florida Cracker cattle are also some recessive spotted cattle. These are rare in most lines, and could be considered evidence of outside breeding. In these old lines with accurate histories of genetic isolation, these somewhat unusual or rare spotting patterns are perfectly acceptable.

The Conway cattle are raised by Bura Conway and his son Bruce in Richton, Mississippi. Bura began managing his father's herd at age 14 in 1910, since his father had an injury that kept him from actively managing the herd himself. Bura preferred red speckled cows and tended to keep those for the herd. The herd was maintained within itself until about 1938 when a bull was added to the herd.

This bull was from a speckled bull that Bura had seen while deer hunting on Pascagoula Creek. That speckled bull had produced a speckled heifer from a Devon cow, and this speckled heifer and her bull calf were the ones introduced into the Conway herd. The bull was most likely 1/4 Devon breeding, and his offspring only 1/8 Devon. This is the only introduction into the herd, and since 1938 the herd has been totally closed.

Initially single sires were used in the Conway herd, but as numbers increased they began to use two bulls at a time. Bulls are currently used in

the herd until they are 8 or 9 years old. The Conway cattle were used extensively for the production of oxen for use in the southern logging industry. At one point Bura had a team of 4 yoke of identical twin oxen. Each pair was identical in color and horn length and shape. All of the Conway cattle are some variant of red and white, with many of them attractively speckled. Although the shade of red does vary the overall impression of the whole herd is a herd of peppermints. The cows are of good conformation and produce calves regularly until they are in their teens. As with other herds, some of the cows are polled.

The herd owned by Jack Baylis of Petal, Mississippi is one of the larger source herds of Cracker cattle. The herd numbers about 160, and consists of cattle from older lines of Briffin, Thornhill, and Carter cattle. The Briffin cattle are yellow, and can be traced at least in part to French cattle introduced to the area in about 1850. The Briffins ran a sawmill, and the original importation included 300 head. These are small round cattle, with large horns. The Briffin cattle were used locally as dairy cattle, although this no longer continues. The Thornhill cattle are white with red points, and are reputed to be english origin. The Carter strain have been in existence for 100 years or so and are a family strain of cattle from wife of Jack Baylis. Carter cattle vary in color immensely, but do not include black or black derived colors or patterns since this was taken as evidence of Angus breeding. It is

COLONIAL SPANISH CATTLE IN USA

interesting that black was the preferred base color in several of the other pure herds, such as the Holt cattle.

Another Mississippi strain is the Robinson strain, which is now solely represented by a herd owned by Jason Davis, a neighbor of Calvin Eutchins. The Robinson cattle have been influenced by Conway cattle in the past, and are intermediate in type between the smaller beefier Barnes cattle and the larger, rangier Conway cattle. This is consistent with the general trend toward larger cattle in the north and west of the range of the Cracker cattle. All of the Robinson cattle are red of varying shades, and some are white spotted. Some of them are a deep dark red not common in either Texas Longhorns or Cracker cattle, but certainly present as a rare variant. The horns on these cattle vary from incurving and short on the more compact individuals to the more the higher, outswept type on the rangier animals.

The main challenge facing the Florida Cracker breed is to decide exactly which cattle belong in the studbook and which do not. Cattle from all of these family lines are probably all of similar genetic stock, and surely have been selected in similar environments. As such they are very valuable genetic resources for cattle in the humid subtropics. The old family strains are unique sources of genetic combinations, and due to the isolation of some of these strains for several decades they could each be considered a separate breed. This tendency for isolation of original strains is even more marked in the

Cracker cattle than was the case with the Texas Longhorn, since the Cracker breeders tended to operate in total isolation from one another until the late 1980s.

It is a somewhat easy task to take these strains one at a time and decide if they represent the same general breed. Certainly some, such as the Conway cattle, present the problem of deciding how much known outside influence should be allowed. The Briffin line presents a similar problem, since they are reputed to be of french origin. Still, the overall similarity of all of these cattle is great, and all are humpless cattle with long term selection in the humid subtropical environment of the southeast USA, and all are similar to spanish strains elsewhere. The fact that these various strains are more similar to one another than they are to other breed types in the USA is a compelling reason to lump them into the same breed rather than to split what is a small population into still smaller fragments. The incredible aspect of the Cracker cattle is the dedication of generations of the breeders to preserve these old family lines over decades, and in at least a few instances for over a century. This is a valuable and unique genetic resource and hopefully ways to conserve it will be devised and will be successful.

A more significant problem is to decide on the individual cattle that are not from these old family lines and that are presented as representatives of the breed. These cattle are a bigger risk to the genetic purity of the breed, since they may be of

SPONENBERG AND OLSON

different genetic type and yet still *look right*. In this instance history and blood typing can be of great assistance in making what can be difficult decisions. Many cattle on which the Florida Cracker cattle breed will be founded will be of this type, and many breeders have cattle of this type

rather than cattle from the old family lines that have the evidence of historic isolation from other cattle. The need is great to include all cattle that are indeed of the Florida Cracker genetic type, and yet exclude all of those that are not. This is a tough decision to make in some cases.

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