

Fall calves

Two heifers had calves recently.

One was a Black Angus. It produced a totally black calf.



The one in the photos is a Hereford. The calf has classic Hereford markings, as does its mother.

When a heifer gives birth to a calf, it is no longer a heifer. It is a cow.

Last week we moved them home to the Snake River Farm where they will spend the winter. We will gentle and train these cow/calf pairs over the winter.

Next spring they will welcome the new calves that will fill our pastures.

Having an established social group has a great calming effect on young animals when they arrive.

This photo shows the Hereford mother licking its new calf. The cow uses her rough tongue to dry the calf and to fluff its coat.



The second photo shows the new calf's beautiful coat.

Notice the wavy patterns left by mom's tongue strokes.

No matter which season a calf is born into, it is born with a coat that suits the weather. This calf has long thick hair. A coat that is adequate to keep it warm on cold fall nights.

Calves born in summer are born with summer coats and short hair.

I purchased these two heifers along with many others several months ago. A veterinarian checks all of the animals before I bring them home. The veterinarian predicted the Hereford calf. He missed the Angus pregnancy. That is not too surprising. The vet's examination focuses on health issues. The heifers were not supposed to have been exposed to a bull. The animals that graze in our pastures come from small farms in eastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin. Sometimes unexpected pregnancies happen.

Both newborns look exactly like their mothers who are Black Angus and Hereford. That means the bulls that fathered them were of the same breeds as the mothers. Otherwise, the calves would have been of mixed colors.

Those two breeds are the most popular throughout the U.S. Angus cattle were developed in Angus, a county of Scotland. Hereford cattle were developed in a locale of that name in England. Both breeds were brought to the U.S. in the 19th century.

Angus cattle have been selectively bred to be hornless. Hornless breeds of cattle are referred to as "polled." Herefords can be polled or horned. Most Herefords in the Midwest are polled. More Herefords in Western states have horns.

The expression "Black Angus" used to be redundant. In recent decades however, Red Angus have become popular and are now quite common. In my opinion, Red Angus are better grazers than Black Angus. Some strains of Black Angus have been selected for compact bodies that do well in feedlots. Animals that do well on grass have large bellies. They need large bellies to process huge amounts of roughage. Animals that have smaller, compact bellies may do well in feedlots but not as well on grass. Occasionally a prospective customer will ask what breed of beef animals we raise. That is a poorly informed question.

The questioner has been led to believe that Angus cattle produce superior meat.

Angus are not significantly better as individual beef animals than any other breed.

On an individual basis every beef breed has some excellent and some poor animals.

In fact about half of our animals have Angus breeding, either black or red. That is because there are many Angus cattle in this area.

About 30 years ago, the Angus breed association started an advertising program to promote Black Angus. That program has been very successful.

It has been successful in getting people to believe black Angus are best for eating, not in improving the breed in any way.

Good genes matter, but all breeds have good genes, more or less.

Other factors such as diet and lifestyle matter more.

By the way, if a package of meat in a grocery is labeled "Angus" that means the animal had a black hide. It does not actually mean it is Angus. There is no certification for breed, only color.

In order to take advantage of the price premium produced by decades of advertising, other breeds, including Holstein, Limousin and Simmental have also focused on breeding all black cattle.

Tom