

The Origin and Evolution of the Belgian Blue

During the second half of the 19th century, bulls of the Shorthorn breed, the top ranking cattle breed of that time were introduced into Belgium to improve the native cattle population consisting mainly of animals of a dairy type.

From this blend a “dual purpose” type progressively emerged. It was bred and selected in that part of Belgium south of Brussels centered on Ciney and covering the Ardennes hill country. It retained the coat color “polymorphism” inherited from the Shorthorn. The coat of the Belgium lue can be white, blue, blue roan, black and white, or mostly black. The most active phase of the selection for dual purpose was 1920-1950. During 1950-1960, there was a phase of slow transition during which a tendency favoring animals with better muscling developed. This appeared to be the real turning point towards extreme beef type of the present day.

Today, the transformation is complete, with the resulting adequate boned, large-bodied animals with heavy muscling, a strong rump, hidden hips, straight back, and strong legs. It is a quiet, robust, docile and healthy breed. It produces one of the highest yielding carcasses and a killing out percentage between 56%-70%. The meat is tender with the minimum covering of fat, therefore, from the butcher's point of view, a Belgian blue carcass will give more cuts of the first class meat and will yield 79% utilization of carcass.

For the health conscious, it is extremely lean with virtually no marbling and a dense texture. An untrimmed steak contains less cholesterol than lean, skinless chicken. This is the choice for the health conscious who do not want to cut out red meat from their diets. Belgian Blues represents high quality beef with low fat, the kind the discerning European palate insists on. In other words, it's steak, not sizzle. That's the kind of quality beef the public wants to buy. Most conventional American beef is from animals that have been pumped with growth hormones and

contains large amounts of fat. (see comparison chart of Poultry, Traditional American Beef, Lite American Beef, and Beefalo.)

All that needed to be done was to Americanize the breed. In the late 1980's the Blues were brought to the states. Cattle in Belgium are handled different than in America. Therefore the challenge was to build on their foundation and add correctness of structure, longevity and natural calving ease - the requirements that American Cattlemen demand. Cows that will wean calves at 210 days that will equal over 50% of their mothers body weight are a goal we have and will meet. To achieve these goals we are line breeding for specific traits.

Our goals at Elmcrest Genetics and Kehrl's Kattle are:

- 1) Raise and share Americanized Belgium Blue genetics with our customers.*
- 2) Produce more saleable meat on every carcass to help feed our ever growing population*
- 3) Produce more profit for our customers who are raising this beef*
- 4) Raise a product that is tender, tasty, lean and healthy for you.*

*Give us a call at (563) 920-8494...
we love to talk about the Blues!*