

Interview with Penny, Cattle Farmer

Penny discusses which techniques they use when breeding their cattle, which include heavily muscled and non heavily muscled cattle.

It depends on what traits you are working for in your animals. We were working for better hooves in our cattle than what the breed has in Europe. Here, our animals were more active and had to walk around more than in Europe. This really has to do more with what we are using them for versus what farmers in Europe use the cattle for. In Europe, the heavily muscled cattle are used for both meat and dairy production, while here, we only use them for meat. Our cattle need to be more mobile and are housed with non heavily muscled cattle, but in Europe they really only live in a barn and don't move around much, so having good hooves and legs aren't as important to farmers there as it is here.

We also looked for pelvic readings in both the bulls and heifers (female cattle) because heavily muscled cattle need to be born by C-sections since they are so big. Over our time having cattle, around 25 years, we were able to selectively breed our cattle so that our last heifer could give birth to all her calves naturally. Our first heifer had to have C-sections for every birth. She had so many C-sections, that the doctor was going to have to use her other side due to scar tissue to deliver any future calves. So we looked for bulls and heifers with wider pelvic readings to make sure they had easier births.

If we were breeding purebred heavily muscled cattle, we typically used AI, or artificial insemination, to make sure that we could get the two traits we were looking for. We did this a lot of time because many of the bulls were related to the heifers we wanted to breed, so we needed to avoid that or because we wanted to see what traits would happen if we used different bulls with our stock. A lot of times the AI wouldn't work, so we would have to put a bull in with the heifer, we call that clean-up.

If our bull didn't have those traits we were selecting for, we'd let him out in the pasture with our commercial herd, or non heavily muscled cattle. So sometimes we would end up with calves that were heavily muscled and other times they wouldn't be. For those that aren't purebred, you wouldn't know if they were heavily muscled until they were three or four weeks old. Some of them would look in-between, some weren't heavily muscled at all, and others looked purebred.

One of the best things about the heavily muscled cattle is the quality of their beef. Their meat is real low in cholesterol, it's up there with chicken breast. You also get a lot more meat from one heavily muscled cow than a non heavily muscled cow. So it's a lot healthier than most other red meat and because you get more meat from one cow, it's better economically for the farmer.