

## **Cattlemen Stand Behind South Devon Regional Performance Impressive**

*By Kelli Chrisman*

South Devon cattle have been time tested for mothering ability, milk and docility, pounds of performance and production of tasteful tender beef for 100's of years in England their native country and in 1969 through 1974 a portion of the genetic pool was exported to North America where cattlemen continue to appreciate the special attributes of this mainstream breed.

Commercial cattlemen and purebred producers in a variety of regional areas throughout the U.S. and Canada are utilizing South Devon in their crossbreeding programs to increase heterosis, thereby increasing pounds at weaning and productivity in the feedlot and for the beef retailer. "The adaptability of the breed to perform in many different types of environments and their ability to offer similar performance to continental breeds make them an English crossbreeding alternative," said Dar Giess, World South Devon Society president and owner of DarLynn Cattle Company, Pierz, MN. "South Devon can and will play an important role in the commercial industry because of their ability to increase heterosis."

Roy Davis and his wife Moppy raise nearly 100 head of commercial cattle at Grassy Creek Ranch located in Southeastern Texas in the town of Navasota. Their herd began as a grade group of cattle and since has developed into Brahman and South Devon cross cattle. Roy purchases purebred South Devon bulls from Oklahoma and has done quite well with this cross. Most of his cattle are three-quarters South Devon, while some are half bloods.

The Navasota area experiences extremely hot and humid summers with temperatures upwards of 100 degrees, along with about 80% humidity. Additionally, they receive about 40 inches of rainfall per year. Davis thinks South Devon cattle do really well in this type of environment and the ranch has one of the only South Devon herds in the area.

Grassy Creek Ranch participates in the Texas A&M Extension Ranch to Rail program, where they retain ownership of their steers and receive feed efficiency and carcass data on their cattle. Grassy Creek's cattle have done very well the last few years, with their data sitting in the top 10% of all participants' herds.

Davis says, "I retired and we moved to our place in Navasota and one of the great things about South Devon cattle is that they are very easy to handle and you just don't have trouble with them. We can do all the work ourselves." Moppy adds, "Being in our late 60's, we enjoy working with the cattle because they are so gentle. I have driven up beside our bulls in the pasture and sprayed fly spray on them without a problem."

From the plains of Texas to northwestern North Dakota, the praise for the adaptability of South Devon cattle continues at the Dahl Land & Cattle Company located in Gackle. A commercial cattle and seed stock operation, operating for over 55 years, with nearly 200 head of South Devon cattle Jack Dahl, past president of the NCA and a recent recipient of the North American South Devon Association Hall of Fame award was introduced to the breed by a friend in Nebraska 35 years ago. Later another friend of Dahls was buying South Devon bulls from South Dakota and bragged to him about the breed, so Dahl decided to try South Devons. He purchased some semen and artificially inseminated some of his females. Now about half of his herd are registered South Devon and the other half are commercial crossbreds.

Dahl discovered South Devon cattle excel in a number of areas. He has been particularly impressed with their good disposition, maternal qualities and the carcass traits. Dahl believes by adding all the great South Devon qualities together, a producer, in turn, has an animal that is more profitable.

Another cattleman who found the traits of the South Devon breed to be profitable is John Grande who runs a commercial cow/calf operation near Martinsdale, Montana. He uses South Devon as one of three breeds in a rotational cross. Most of his cattle are one-quarter up to five-eighths South Devon. Living in the foothills, with elevations of 5,200 to 7,000 feet, average rainfall of about 16 inches and severe, snowy winters can be tough on cattle. Grande has found that South Devon cattle perform well in these conditions.

Grande began using South Devons in his herd 10 years ago. He purchased his first South Devon bulls from the Midland Bull Test in Columbus, Montana. Since Grande retains ownership on most of his cattle, he strives to raise cattle that will perform in the feedlot and on the rail. The environment at the Grande Ranch requires cows that are able to climb hills and graze the whole pasture, instead of grazing primarily on flat lands and by water. In order to be profitable Grande needs cattle that will cover some ground and make use of the entire offering of grazing land.

The Grande Ranch is concerned about mature cow size. However, the ranch typically has plenty of grass and they are able to run larger cows than some range operations. Grande likes to have 1,300-pound cows—he feels they work best in the ranch environment. To the Grande Ranch crossbreeding is important. Heterosis adds muscle and pounds at weaning as well as contributes to carcass marbling. Crossbred cows also have increased fertility with more bred and fewer open. Grande says, “South Devon are not as heavily muscled compared to the continental breeds, but they are the better of the British breeds.”

Grande Ranch cattle are primarily sent to two feedlots. One is Darr Feedlot in Cozad, Nebraska and the other is Solaris Feeders in Miles City, Montana. Finished steers are marketed in May and June while heifers not retained for breeding are usually finished for the November/December market. When Chris Knudsen of Darr Feedlot was contacted he only offered positive comments about Grande Ranch cattle. “Grande cattle show good performance, good confirmation, are easy to handle and take right to the feed. They finish slightly ahead of the other cattle on feed. Grande cattle are ‘kind of the ticket,’” says Knudsen. “These cattle get right to business after traveling from Montana to Nebraska and we don’t usually have any problems with sickness.” Knudsen finished by saying, “Let’s put it this way. If Grande is ever looking for a partner, one of us is ready to jump.”

For the last 12 years, Lee Englehardt, has also found that South Devon cattle have been profitable for X-E South Devons located in Moses Lake, Washington a purebred and commercial cow/calf operation. The ranch has over 200 head of registered South Devon cattle as well as half and three-quarter blood South Devon Angus Simmental cross cows. Each year Englehardt holds back replacement heifers and about 20 bull calves. Additionally, he feeds around 150 head of steers at North Platte Feeders in North Platte, Nebraska.

X-E South Devons is in the center of Washington, where the climate is high desert, and they only receive about 5 inches of rain annually. The South Devon cattle do well in this environment and they also thrive in the local mountains. In fact, Englehardt says, “these cattle adapt to our ranch environments better than any other breed.”

Englehardt is also impressed with the longevity of South Devon cattle. Most of X-E's cows live to 13 years of age and are still producing quality calves. Additionally he strongly approves of the breed's maternal abilities. Englehardt says, "I haven't pulled a calf in years." The ranch is able to get 97% of his cows bred back every year without any problems. Finally Englehardt emphasized how docile South Devon are—explaining that even if the cattle ran on pasture all winter, they remain gentle.

When asked about successes in the feedlot, Englehardt replies that his cattle always have high yields and better carcass quality--equaling more profitability. In 13 ½ months he can get a calf from birth to harvest. The breed grows and converts feed really well, also generating a higher profit. Englehardt says, "South Devon cattle are the most complete, most bulletproof, as I call 'em."