

THE RED POLL

The Red Poll was formed in East Anglia by the fusion of two distinct breeds, the Norfolk Red and the Suffolk Dun at the beginning of the 1800s. Classes for this deep red, naturally polled breed were first held at the Royal Show in 1862 and the first herd book was published privately in 1874 by Henry Euren who was to become the first Secretary of the Breed Society, which was formed in 1888. Since those days the breed has spread all over the country and indeed all over the world. Today there are 7500 registered cattle in the UK being managed by 300 plus breeders

The Red Poll is a truly dual-purpose breed. The benefit of this is that cows used to suckle calves have plenty of milk to feed two calves: an important characteristic of the breed is that the cows will readily take a second calf. For both milk and beef the Red Poll has a high conversion ratio. The lactation curve is typically long and flat, rather than a high early peak quickly tailing away, giving an economical production of milk. A cow will yield, for example, 5,500 kgs. of milk in a lactation without ever giving more than 22 kgs. in a day and may be dried off after 305 days still giving 10 kgs. and more. The cows do not need high protein supplements and if good quality bulk feeds are given only medium levels of protein and minerals are needed as a dairy ration. The butterfat content of the milk is approximately 4.2% and the protein content of 3.6% ensures a high premium payment. If well fed and well managed the Red Poll will compete in profitability with any breed.

On the beef side, the carcass has a high killing out percentage. Red Poll steers regularly produce a killing out percentage of over 55%. Red Poll steers are highly valued by butchers. Bulls finished intensively weigh 600 kgs. at 14-15 months; extensively finished steers will weigh 550-650 kgs. at 24-30 months.

The Red Poll crossed with a pure beef breed will produce an excellent calf which will be extremely well fed by its mother and the naturally polled characteristic is transmitted to its cross-bred offspring. Temperament of the cows is excellent, as are mothering characteristics. The Red Poll is noted for a low incidence of calving difficulties.

The breed is the longest living dairy breed and cows milking in their teens are not at all uncommon. This allows heifers to be sold instead of having to be kept as replacements. The incidence of illness and metabolic problems is low and feet and udders are excellent. The breed was formed in an area which tends to be very cold in winter and suffers drought in the summer and this has resulted in producing a very hardy animal.

The Red Poll is very popular abroad, especially in Canada, North and South America, Jamaica and Australasia, and it is very able to adapt to extremes of temperature. The pigmented skin protects it against skin diseases prevalent in areas of high light density and its ability to produce milk from poor quality grazing is important in these countries. In Brazil, Jamaica and Colombia the Red Poll was used to produce the Pitangueiras, the Jamaican Red and the Velazquez breeds designed to meet the local requirements of those countries.

The Breed Society markets and distributes Red Poll semen and details of those bulls are available from the Society. Tel: 01245 600032. secretary@redpoll.co.uk
www.redpoll.org

