

The History of Gelbvieh

The Gelbvieh (pronounced Gelp-fee) breed is one of the oldest German cattle breeds, first found mainly in three Franconian districts of Bavaria. Starting in 1850, systematic breeding work began in stud herds. By purebreeding, the "red-yellow Franconian cattle" were developed from several local strains, including Celtic-German Landrace and Heil-Brown Landrace cattle. These local strains have been further improved with intensive breeding work since 1870. This solid-colored breed of red-yellow cattle enjoyed great popularity as draft and slaughter cattle.

Several societies for improved breeding of the cattle were founded. The societies aimed at improvement through standardizing the indigenous breed by selecting the best bulls, purebreeding for a single color and improvement of performance in work fitness and milk production. In 1897, the Breed Society for Yellow Franconia Cattle for Middle and Upper Franconia in Nurnberg was founded. It was followed by the Breed Society for Gelbvieh in Lower Franconia, based in Wurzburg and founded in 1899.

Since World War II, Germany has used a stringent selection program to repopulate its cattle herds. Only three percent of the registered cows are used to produce potential bulls. These cows are selected on structural soundness and conformation.

Bulls from these select cows were performance-tested, and the top half are progeny-tested. The progeny evaluation included gestation length, birth weight, calving ease, growth rate, slaughter weight, carcass quality conformation, udder soundness and fertility and milk production in daughters. Semen was released only from bulls that prove their superiority in progeny testing.

In the 1960s, Red Danish cattle were introduced to the herd book to improve milk production. LeHall, the director of International Marketing for Carnation Genetics, first saw Gelbvieh cattle in 1969. He worked toward importing Gelbvieh semen to the U.S., and finally was able to bring 43,000 units here in 1971. In that same year, the American Gelbvieh Association was formed.

Today, there are approximately 70,000 active, registered Gelbvieh cows in the United States and nearly 2,000 active members of the American Gelbvieh Association (AGA). AGA is the largest Gelbvieh association in the world and ranks eighth in number of registered animals among beef breed associations in the United States. Most registered U.S. Gelbvieh are classified as purebreds (15/16 for Gelbvieh bulls and 7/8 or higher for Gelbvieh females), and were bred up by mating fullbloods and purebred Gelbvieh bulls to foundation cows

Gelbvieh calves are widely recognized for excellence in growth, muscling and marketability, while Gelbvieh females are known for milking ability, fertility and quiet temperament.