



THE CHAROLAIS HERITAGE ...A Brief History

In the mid-1940s an outbreak of foot and mouth disease occurred in Mexico. As a result, a treaty between the United States, Canada and Mexico set up a permanent quarantine against cattle coming into any of these countries from Europe or any country where the disease was known to exist.

The first Charolais came into the United States from Mexico in 1934. From that beginning, the breed grew rapidly. Wherever they were shown, the big white cattle commanded instant attention. Cattlemen admired both Charolais bulls and females for their muscling, correctness and size. They were also very impressed with their calves. An ever-expanding demand for purebred Charolais seedstock kept an active market for both bulls and females. Livestock producers across the country were searching for animals who would improve their profit picture.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the breeders established the American Charbray Breeders Association and the American Charolais Breeders Association, both of which limited pedigrees to a blend of Charolais and Brahman breeding. Producers who were utilizing other beef breed cows to produce Charolais by compounding Charolais blood through successive generations, formed the International Charolais Association. In 1957, the American and International Charolais Associations merged into today's American-International Charolais Association (AICA). In 1964, the Pan-American Charolais Association, whose registrations were based on performance rather than genetic content, merged into the AICA. Three years later, the American Charbray Breeders Association merged with the AICA, bringing all Charolais-based breeds in the United States under the fold of a single breed registry.

With the limited availability of pure Charolais during the early years, American breeders established a five generation "breeding-up" program to expand the breed. This program involved using purebred Charolais bulls for five consecutive generations to produce a 31/32 Charolais animal. Geneticists say this percentage is the equivalent of a purebred, containing only 3% of the genetic material from the foundation breed.

Charolais is a naturally horned beef animal, but through the breeding-up program, using other breeds carrying the polled gene, polled Charolais emerged. Some of the breed's strongest herds and leading breeders specialize in the production of high performing polled Charolais.

No other breed has impacted the North American beef industry so significantly as Charolais. These white cattle have changed beef production concepts as much or more than the original British breeds did for the gaunt Longhorn in the American Southwest more than a century ago.

The Charolais breed has changed the nation's thinking regarding efficient beef production standards. Charolais cattle have demonstrated a definite superiority in growth ability, efficient feedlot gains and carcass cut-out values. Today, Charolais top all breeds in nearly every category of performance in the records of beef performance testing organizations.

One of the oldest of the French cattle breeds, Charolais is considered of Jurassic origin and was developed in the district around Charolles in Central France. The breed was established there and become regarded as a producer of highly rated meat in the markets at Lyon and Villefranche in the 16th and 17th centuries. There is also historical evidence that these white cattle were being noticed as early as 878 A.D.

In 1773, after the French Revolution, Claude Mathieu, a cattle breeder from the Charolles region, moved to the Nevers province, taking with him his herd of Charolais. The breed flourished there, so much in fact, that the cattle were known more widely as Nivernais cattle.

One of the early influential herds in the region was started in 1840 by the Count Charles de Bouille. His selective breeding led him to develop a herd book in 1864 at his stable at Villars near the village of Magny-Cours. Breeders in the Charolles vicinity established a herd book in 1882 and the two merged in 1919, with the older organization taking the records of the latter group into their headquarters at Nevers, the capital of the Nièvre province.

Soon after the First World War, a young Mexican industrialist of French name and ancestry, Jean Pugibet, brought some of the French cattle to his ranch in Mexico. He had seen the Charolais during World War I and was impressed by their appearance and productivity.