

# Quality beef from quality animals

British cattle for export

AHDB



BEEF & LAMB

## Wide gene pool and high performance

England offers an unrivalled variety of quality breeding cattle, with over 20 different beef breeds to choose from. These different breeds cover a range of production attributes and are suited to many environments and climates to produce the perfect beef. This leaflet highlights the advantages of some breeds of interest to importers looking for specific genetic traits to ensure that specific breeding goals are achieved or to strengthen existing stock.

English livestock genetics are internationally renowned for their quality and suitability to increasing the profitability of livestock farming, with livestock being used around the world to improve local breeds. Increasingly, importers are learning about structured cross-breeding to exploit the benefits of each breed, while capitalising on hybrid vigour.

More is expected from less, in a shorter timescale and with lower environmental costs. In order to achieve this, the genetic potential of every animal in terms of growth, carcase quality, ease of calving, offspring survival, has to be optimum. The genetic potential of each animal must be realised through production performance within a specific farming system or environment.

English beef cattle produce high-quality meat from quality animals. The different cattle breeds are crossed to produce many possibilities in terms of differentiated products, that can improve producers' returns through targeting premium markets.

## Proven genetic progress in quantitative and molecular genetics

Since 1964, English breeders have been using recording and performance testing. This led to the introduction of Best Linear Unbiased Predictor (BLUP) across the UK and Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) in the early 1990s, which allows cattle across England to be compared on a modern, reliable system. Through using EBVs and recording, English breeders have been able to advance their breeds quicker and more accurately to reflect the needs of the environment and industry.

England was a pioneer in the development of artificial insemination (AI) in cattle. The technique was originally perfected using fresh semen, however advances mean that semen can now be frozen for storage and future use. This advancement has seen breeds develop quicker than through natural service, and markets open up for international trade.

It is now possible to source and purchase sexed semen in order to reach specific breeding goals. The UK has many commercial companies pioneering Embryo Transfer (ET) technologies, adhering strictly to IETS protocols. Professional exporters ensure that these embryos can be delivered throughout the world.

## Health control and world leading reproduction technologies

British scientists are at the heart of international efforts to map the cattle genome and develop new tests for livestock. This technology can be used to improve production of quality meat or identify those animals that have resistance to certain diseases.

Cattle identification and traceability is an integral part of maintaining consumer confidence. Cattle are identified according to legislation and issued with a passport. All movements of cattle are recorded on a central database (Cattle Tracing System – CTS) through the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS). The CTS allows the whereabouts of cattle to be checked, trace animals that may be at risk of disease exposure and, ultimately, give buyers and consumers full confidence.

There are a number of cattle health schemes promoted in England and four diseases are controlled in individual herds: Bovine Virus Diarrhoea (BVD), Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR), Leptospirosis and Johne's disease. Cattle for international trade undergo testing according to strict protocols. Artificial insemination and embryo transfer centres are approved and monitored by health authorities according to EU, OIE and International Embryo Transfer Society Standards. This means that English cattle, semen and embryos can be exported with a high, fully defined and guaranteed health status.



# Cattle Breeds



**Aberdeen Angus** – The Aberdeen Angus has seen rapid expansion within the UK and globally. Increasing in popularity due to its ability to thrive in lower input systems with hardiness and ‘will to live’. Advantages include: it is naturally polled which makes for ease of calving, regular breeding, foraging ability, longevity and the ability to produce a high-quality beef carcass with the minimum of supplementary feeding. An ideal breed for crossing in both beef and dairy herds. Offspring grow quickly and confidently into highly acceptable quality cattle with a medium-sized carcass of 280kg to 320kg.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,000kg, cows 600kg**



**Beef Shorthorn** – The oldest of recorded breeds with pedigrees dating back to 1822. The breed celebrates its good fertility, mobility and longevity coupled with hardiness, ease of calving and ability to finish easily on grass, making it a superior suckler cow. The Beef Shorthorn is known as the ‘great improver’ because of its suitability to cross with other breeds. It has been used in the formation of over 40 different breeds around the world and is regaining popularity in the UK. The meat is well marbled with excellent eating quality.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,000kg, cows 600kg**

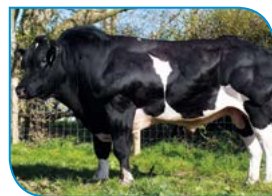


**British Blonde** – First imported in the 1970s the British Blonde thrives all over the UK. Developed by breeders into a first-class beef animal, the British Blonde is used as a terminal beef sire. Maternal attributes are becoming more popular in recent years. The breed offers rapid growth from birth, conformation where it is needed, high killing out percentages, few calving difficulties, high meat to bone ratio, and good temperament. The health schemes in England ensure a higher guaranteed health status than many other European countries.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,100kg, cows 850kg**



**British Blue** – Between 1920 and 1950, the breed was selected for dual purpose animals, moving around 1950–60 to favour a heavier muscled animal, the ‘Blue’ animal known today was created and imported in the 1980s. English breeders have refined the breed to develop animals with good mobility/structure, short gestation periods and a docile temperament. As a crossing sire, calving difficulty is less than experienced with other European breeds and produces a quality commercial carcass with high boning out percentage in excess of 83 per cent. It is widely used in dairy systems to produce well fleshed calves.



**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,250kg, cows 850kg**

**British Charolais** – Imported in 1962, the British Charolais has retained its position in the UK as a leading terminal sire breed for over 30 years. Used in suckler herds, it consistently delivers progeny with high daily liveweight gain and quality carcasses, ultimately maximising financial returns. Bulls can be found working in diverse environments from the uplands to the lowlands of England. Breeding has placed emphasis on calving ease, temperament, milk and fertility. British Charolais are hardy and versatile, producing exceptional growth rate and conformation.

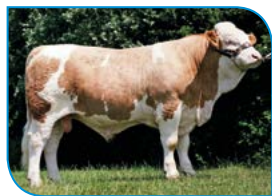


**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,250kg, cows 1,000kg**

**British Limousin** – ‘The ‘Carcass Breed’, a breed able to produce quality beef with low percentage of bone and fat. The success of the British Limousin is the outstanding combination of maternal and terminal traits. Females are easy calving, simple to manage and long-lived. Bulls contribute performance, growth and conformation. The breed can easily produce  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  bred carcasses with excellent quality and conformation. An early maturing breed, the British Limousin produces younger but mature beef at a medium weight range suitable for butchers and supermarkets alike. They are naturally hardy, thrifty and easy to manage in a range of environments. These traits have seen the British Limousin grow to be the most favoured breed in the UK.



**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,000kg, cows 600kg**



**British Simmental** – A breed suited to many different environments and farming systems, with the ability to milk well and produce fast-growing finishing cattle. Since its importation to Britain from several countries, breeders have concentrated on improving the beef traits within the breed without losing prolificacy or milking ability. The potential for high daily liveweight gain and feed efficiency from grass or concentrates, makes a British Simmental cross highly profitable in a variety of finishing systems. Calves grow quickly from an early age and finish without laying down excess fat.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,100kg, cows 650kg**



**Devon** – One of the oldest native English breeds (known as the ‘Red Ruby’) originating from North Devon in South West England, with the society being formed in 1884. Devons are rich red in colour and were originally horned but a polled strain is available today. The breed is low maintenance, easy handling, tolerant to extremes of climate and has the ability to fatten almost exclusively from grass, which gives it an advantage over larger breeds. Bulls are extremely fertile and produce a full flavoured marbled carcass. Having a quiet browsing nature, the breed causes less damage to land and is very suitable for organic systems and areas where environmental damage is a concern.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 900kg, cows 500kg**



**Hereford** – The Hereford is one of the oldest of England’s native cattle breeds. Pedigree cattle have been recorded since 1846 and, over the generations, the breed has been improved. Herefords have been bred for docility, growth, ease of calving and carcass quality. Phenotype variability ensures that the breed is capable of adapting to all types of production systems and environmental conditions. Hereford genetics are popular and have been exported all over the world. The meat is sought after, having a distinctive flavour and renowned quality.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,100kg, cows 700kg**

**Highland** – The Highland breed has a long and distinguished ancestry, with the breed society being formed in 1884. A distinctive well-known breed with a long, thick, flowing coat of rich hair and majestic sweeping horns. The Highland is particularly hardy and adaptable, with high survival instincts ensuring they can withstand extreme weather conditions. Tremendous mothers that calf easily outdoors, Highlands have naturally good health and foraging ability that ensure they require the minimum of attention. Meat is lean, well marbled with low fat and cholesterol levels, while retaining protein and flavour - “as nature intended”. Beef from Highland cattle is sought after by exclusive butchers and restaurants.



**Average adult body weight – bulls 850kg, cows 550kg**

**Longhorn** – The Longhorn is noted for its “feed responsive milk supply” ensuring that the cows service their calves well, while ensuring their condition is maintained. The high butter fat content of their milk is well known to produce a “bloom” in suckled calves and is famous for its use in Stilton and Red Leicester cheeses. The Longhorn has a good combination of qualities including, milk, calving ease, longevity, docility, length and leanness of body that is unrivaled by any other breed. The Longhorn cow is adaptable and long-lived and can produce/rear big, fast-growing calves to any breed of bull.



**Average adult body weight – bulls 950kg, cows 600kg**

**Red Poll** – Developed in the late 1700s to provide a dual-purpose animal to graze poor pastures. The Red Poll is deep red in colour, medium-sized and extremely hardy, being proven in tropical climates. Meat from the Red Poll is noted for its tenderness. Cows are long-lived, producing calves up to the age of 17. Most herds are single or multi suckler, but some are pure dairy herds used to produce cheese. The Red Poll is a low input animal which finishes well on grass and is particularly suited to organic systems. The Red Poll has been used as the basis for new breeds.



**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,000kg, cows 650kg**



**South Devon** – The South Devon is the largest of native English cattle breeds and is well known for its maternal, beef, docility, milk and butter fat qualities. It is, ideally, placed in the modern suckler herd, able to thrive in both intensive and extensive systems, in a commercial or pure bred herd. Its long established attributes ensure it is highly suitable for crossing with other native and continental breeds to suit the individual producer's specific requirements. Cows are long-lived, excellent mothers producing fast-growing calves with good conformation. The South Devon is an efficient grass converter producing top grade carcasses with marbled/well grained meat.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,250kg, cows 675kg**



**Sussex** – Sussex cattle have been developed over many hundreds of years with the society registering calves since 1840. The Sussex is a beef breed that has the ability to convert even poor-quality forage into good growth rates, finishing cattle within 18 to 20 months. Their coat changes between summer and winter, thereby allowing them to survive in extremes of climate. This combined with high fertility and ease of calving lead to an excellent carcass quality with texture and flavour. Once used as a draught animal, they have good feet, strong legs and a lighter weight of bone. They are placid with a good temperament.

**Average adult body weight – bulls 1,250kg, cows 675kg**

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England has a wide diversity of beef breeds with various aptitudes to suit your production requirements. With over 20 different breeds in the UK, it is not possible to list them all in this leaflet. There are other specialist dairy breeds that are all available for export. Should you require further information please speak to an AHDB Beef & Lamb representative or contact us at the address below.

Website:  
[www.britishtlivestockgenetics.com](http://www.britishtlivestockgenetics.com)

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