

“Florida Cracker” Cattle Make A Comeback

Florida Cracker cattle get their name from the early 1800's when “cow hunters”, or “crackers”, used dogs and cracked whips to round up wild Spanish cattle. Despite nearing extinction at one point, cattle producers dedicated to the heritage breed estimate there are now around 900 Florida Cracker cattle. Other breeds that descended from the wild Spanish cattle include the Pineywoods, which thrive in Mississippi, Alabama and southern Georgia, and the Longhorns in Texas.

“I don't feed them at all, just some hay in the winter and a molasses block. And I don't worm them; they're parasite resistant,” says Ralph Wright of Lake City, Florida, who raises a dozen Cracker and Pineywoods cattle on 20 acres.

His father was a cow hunter, Wright explains, and the Wright family has always appreciated the heritage breeds. They have been a big part of the South's history - first used to feed southern troops in the Civil War and later soldiers in the Spanish American War. They almost disappeared when European breeds were introduced in the late 1940's, but a few families maintained their purebred herds.

In 1970, the Florida Department of Agriculture bought and managed a herd of Florida Cracker cattle. In 1988 the Florida Cracker Cattle Association organized, and the Pineywoods Cattle Registry & Breeders Association organized in 1999. Cattle owners like the breeds for their hardiness, easy calving and longevity.

“They're smaller than commercial breeds at less than 1,000 lbs, but are capable of breeding as early as 8 mos. of age, and some have calves until their late teens

and early 20's,” Wright says. “I have even heard of Pineywoods calving into their 30's.”

Cracker Cattle horns have a greater tendency to go up rather than out, and are shorter than those of Texas Longhorns, which make them more suited to surviving in the thick woods and brushy areas in Florida.

“They come in every color that you can think of,” Wright says. “I've got one bull that's a Parker brown coloration. He was born a red and white, within a month he was brown and white, and three months later he was black and white. Now he has a frosted black color with red and burgundy accents.”

Though the Spanish breeds adapted to the humidity and parasites of the South, they can also be found on Midwest farms and as far north as Maine. Breeding stock, and meat, sell for prices similar to other lean, grass-fed cattle. Wright notes the organizations' goal is to preserve the breeds, not make it an expensive exotic breed people can't afford.

Anyone interested in checking out the breeds can find information and cattle for sale on the associations' websites.

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Pineywoods Cattle Registry & Breeders Association, Julie Brown, Secretary, 183 Sebron Ladner Rd., Poplarville, Miss. 39470 (ph 601 795-4672; www.pineywoods.cattle.org) or

Florida Cracker Cattle Association, Dr. Tim Olson, P.O. Box 110910, Department of Animal Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611 (www.cracker.cattle.org).



Near extinction at one point, “Florida Cracker” cattle are making a comeback in some Southern states. They're descended from wild Spanish cattle.



Pineywoods cattle, like this one, are related to “Florida Crackers”.

Horsehair Jewelry

“We specialize in real horsehair jewelry and accessories. It's our passion to keep the traditions of the American cowboy alive through the unique, high quality accessories that we craft,” says RockingHorse Ridge Horsehair Products owner Roberta Edstrom. “We're the nation's largest retailer of horsehair accessories. We sell thousands of hand braided and hitched items with unique designs in natural pigments as well as vibrant dyed colors.”

Using the professionally cleaned hair from horse's tails, in combination with quality leather and silver accents, the Mesa, Arizona company makes items such as: bracelets, barrettes, belts, belt buckles, scarf slides, curb straps, earrings, hat bands, dog collars, keychains, necklaces, shu flies, stampede strings, tassels, zipper pulls and mecate/bosal reins.

RockingHorse Ridge stresses that their products “are the highest quality that you will find in traditional, authentic cowboy gear.” One hundred percent satisfaction is guaranteed and if you don't love the quality, style and beauty, you can return any item for your money back with “no questions asked.”

Some sample prices include: \$29.99 for a hitched horsehair bracelet, \$15 for a 5-strand, adjustable horsehair hat band with double tassels, and \$2.25 for a horsehair tassel zipper pull (in your choice of eight vibrant colors).

The company also sells horsehair for fly fishing (1oz.) and bulk horsehair (1 lb.) for crafts. For people who want to make their own horsehair accessories,



Horsehair belt was made from professionally cleaned tail hair.

RockingHorse Ridge sells books that teach horsehair hitching, braiding and rope making skills.

“Recently, we started making custom pieces from our clients' own horse hair. Memorial horsehair pots are decorative vessels created from wheel-thrown clay, and then bisque fired,” Edstrom says. “Individual strands of horsehair are then placed in horizontal, diagonal, or vertical patterns against the hot surface of the ceramic piece.”

The horse hair burns and shrivels up, forming ash so that a small deposit of carbon and smoke is absorbed into the clay surface, leaving a permanent trace of the horsehair on the pot, resulting in a one-of-a-kind design.

The company is also offering memorial horse portraits on slate. Clients send them a picture of their horse, and an artist creates its likeness on the slate.

“We have so many clients asking for memorial pieces that we're working on a new website just for that,” she says.

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Ken O'Brock and his wife Sharen put up 20 to 30 windmills a year and also sell replacement parts.



Windmills Are This Couple's Business

When Ken O'Brock and his wife Sharen bought their farm in North Benton, Ohio, he had no idea that the old windmill on the place would lead to their life's work.

They run an unusual mom and pop business. You call them for a windmill and they put it up even though both are afraid of heights.

“I never quit being afraid of heights,” O'Brock says. “It's like riding a motorcycle. When you're not afraid of the motorcycle anymore, it's time to hang it up because you're going to have an accident.”

While Ken works up on the tower, Sharen ties parts onto a pulley and sends them up so he can fit them in place.

Although some of the windmills they sell are used primarily for advertising, most are used to pump water.

A windmill powering a 4-in. cylinder can pump 800 gal. per hour in a 15 mph breeze.

And, while the average well is less than 100 ft. deep, they can pump water from as deep as 1,000 ft. Their life span is a minimum of 40 years.

The O'Brocks put up between 20 and 30 windmills per year and deal mostly in Australian and South African windmills under the brand name Southern Cross.

While the couple requires on-site help for digging footings and pouring concrete, the actual erection is pretty old fashioned. Once underway, the O'Brocks can assemble a 40-ft. tower in 1 1/2 hrs.

They also sell windmill parts through a catalog and online. O'Brock says they sell vanes, bearings, pivots and other replacement parts.

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