



# LET'S TALK LONGHORNS!

By David Nikodym

As I write this article, I am sure that we at Commanders Place Longhorns aren't the only Texas Longhorn Breeders that are experiencing the joy of calving season. For many, including my wife and me, this is the payoff for all the hard work throughout the year. Calving season makes all the hard work worthwhile.

I am going out of the way to show all the readers of the American Livestock Magazine what so many of us know already. Longhorn calves come out in every imaginable pattern and a broad spectrum of colors. J. Frank Dobie wrote in his famous book "The Longhorns; the colors were more varied than those of the rainbow". To many Longhorn Breeders and Enthusiasts this book tells the early history of this incredible breed and is a "Must Read". The colors and patterns do cover the pallet; brindles, blues, grullas (silver), yellow (dun), black, white, brown and red. As Dobie wrote; "The shading and combination of colors were so various that no two were alike".

So now that we have your attention with all the cute babies; let me introduce you to some of the other aspects going on with the Texas Longhorn Breed.

- Calving ease. Many of us actually calve throughout most of the year. From about Kansas south, depending on your climate, you aren't forced into a short breeding/calving window. In the nearing ten years that I have been associated with the breed I have only pulled one calf, and probably didn't have to pull that one either (it was Friday Night though). Many of my friends who raise other breeds have to focus their calving times for their own sanity. Meaning, they are awake and available to assist with birthing. Of course, they also want a consistent calf beginning to end. That helps at marketing time. For many Longhorn breeders, because of the calving ease, we have opened the calving window considerably. In Central Oklahoma, we choose to calf nearly all year. We also show Texas Longhorn cattle, the expanded calving window means our calf crop is spread across many different classes or age

groups. Calving ease is a big deal and Longhorn cattle provide that luxury.

- Commercial Breeders can use Texas Longhorn bulls on their first calf heifers. The low birth weights, usually around 70 lbs., allow a Rancher to breed their younger heifers and make a solid product without the worry of pulling a calf or worse ruining a young replacement heifer. If this is something that sounds interesting to you, I would ask you to pick a color that best matches what you are doing, usually solid red, black or white, and give it a try. I bet the numbers will work for you. I also bet you will be surprised at how economical the purchase of a young Texas Longhorn Bull can be.

- America's Original Beef Breed. I understand that Texas Longhorn Cattle are a bit of a niche breed. I hate to do math in public, but I have heard that we could harvest all the longhorns at once and only feed America for a few hours. Again, not what I would consider a good idea, but it does get the point across. What that trivial bit of wisdom doesn't consider, the Texas Longhorn's longevity and production are both unmatched by any other breed. I have discussed the cross breeding with a Longhorn bull above, but there are several breeders that use Longhorn momma cows and a more "commercial" bull. This allows the rancher to take advantage of the longevity of the Longhorn breed along with the more commercial viability of a Charolais, Angus or Beef Master bull. Many longhorn cows will calve well into their upper teens. I have two cows that were born in 2000 that remain very productive today. Both of the (F1) crosses discussed can be very financially viable and provide crossbred vigor to your herd.

- Disease resistance. The resistance to disease comes from a long history in North America. The Texas Longhorn is the original bovine to this continent. Before the exploration of North America and the bringing of bovine to the "New World" by the



Columbus expeditions, this continent was blessed with Bison and Elk (no bovine). The Texas Longhorn breed was started by escaped and abandoned early cattle that were allowed to survive and breed in south Texas and northern Mexico. Estimates as high as 10 million were driven up the trail to feed a growing nation after the Civil War. Only the strong and well adapted survived those early days. The breed remains very hardy to this day.

- The Longhorn Beef product is somewhat of a niche market, but demand is on the rise. There are numerous ranches out there that produce longhorn beef since it is very lean and low in bad cholesterol. The leanness of the beef is what nearly drove the breed out of existence in the early 1900's. Today that leanness is highly regarded. A quick search on the internet will likely provide you with a source for high quality, lean, tasty Longhorn Beef near you!

These are just some of the economic aspects of the breed. There are several other things to consider when it comes to the registered Texas Longhorn breed;

- Longhorn Show Circuit. The Longhorn show circuit is alive and well and has probably never been on more solid ground. Virtually every weekend there is a Longhorn Show going on somewhere with some of the major shows being the National Western Stock Show, the International Texas Longhorn Association (ITLA) World Championship, the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America (TLBAA) World Championship and the Autobahn Youth Tour show. FFA and 4-H shows are seeing more and more Longhorn entries nationally. The Longhorn Show circuit is worth checking out. You may want to add a Texas Longhorn to your show string, they just might surprise you. A couple of good sources of information about the Texas Longhorn Show Circuit are the websites for the TLBAA and the ITLA. Both the TLBAA and ITLA have local affiliate organizations that do a lot of the show organization heavy lifting.

- Miniature Longhorns. Miniature Longhorns are really taking off. Most shows these days have Miniature Longhorn classes. Additionally they are being measured at the annual major horn measurement competitions. For so many reasons Miniature Longhorns may be the ticket for you. They work exceptionally well for those with small acreages, they are very good when it comes to feed conversion and, oh by the way, they are stinking cute!

- Seed Stock operations are alive and well. There are many longhorn enthusiasts out there whose programs have developed into a

seed stock operation (to include mine). We may not think of it in those terms, but that is exactly what we are doing. Many of us market our product via the internet, social media and registered Longhorn auctions. That model mirrors a Seed Stock operation of other cattle breeds. Not a bad thing, I just think most of us don't think of our operation in those terms. There are several strong breed organizations out there. They include the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America (TLBAA) of which I serve on the Board of Directors, the International Texas Longhorn Association (ITLA) and the Texas Longhorn Marketing Alliance (TLMA). Both the TLBAA and ITLA have several local and regional affiliates. These are great ways to get involved.

- Longhorn Enthusiasts. This is a broad term because there are countless people out there that have just a few Texas Longhorns, sometimes just a steer or two. Some run a Longhorn with the rest of their cows just to have something different to look at. I would say that the vast majority of Longhorn owners have less than ten Longhorns. I just like to call folks like these "Longhorn Enthusiasts". They are probably the back-bone of the breed. Many, if not most, started out as Enthusiasts and somehow, somehow lost control. I blame the loss of control on the Longhorn calves. Their beauty, size and friendliness have charmed us all.

If you haven't considered Longhorns, please do. If you would like to get involved, we can help. There is so much going on with the Breed these days. Just be careful, Longhorn Fever is very contagious.

*About the author:*

*Nik and Kim Nikodym (both Commanders in the U.S. Navy) are registered Texas Longhorn breeders in Central Oklahoma, they own Commanders Place Longhorns. Nik currently serves on the Texas Longhorn Breeders Associate of America (TLBAA) Board of Directors. Kim serves on the TLBAA World Show Steering Committee and is a proud 4-H Mom. Along with their children, they are very active in showing Texas Longhorns; they are also very active in all other aspects of the Longhorn lifestyle. They routinely participate in the industries annual horn measurement contests, futurities and consign to some of the best auctions throughout the country. Additionally they market cattle via their website. For more information about their program please visit: [www.commandersplacelonghorns.com](http://www.commandersplacelonghorns.com).*

