

Cattalo crossbreeds not recommended

Crossbreeding cattle with North American bison may be a boon to the beef industry in some areas, but most farmers should stick to crosses between cattle breeds, says J.E. Lawson, an animal geneticist at Agriculture Canada's Research Station in Lethbridge, Alberta. "Bison-cattle crosses have some advantages over ordinary cattle, but they also have drawbacks."

"There has been a lot of interest recently in crossing cattle with the

"The cattalo project demonstrated that bison-cattle crosses have definite weaknesses," Mr. Lawson says.

"When bison bulls were mated to cattle, heavy losses of cows and calves occurred before calving.

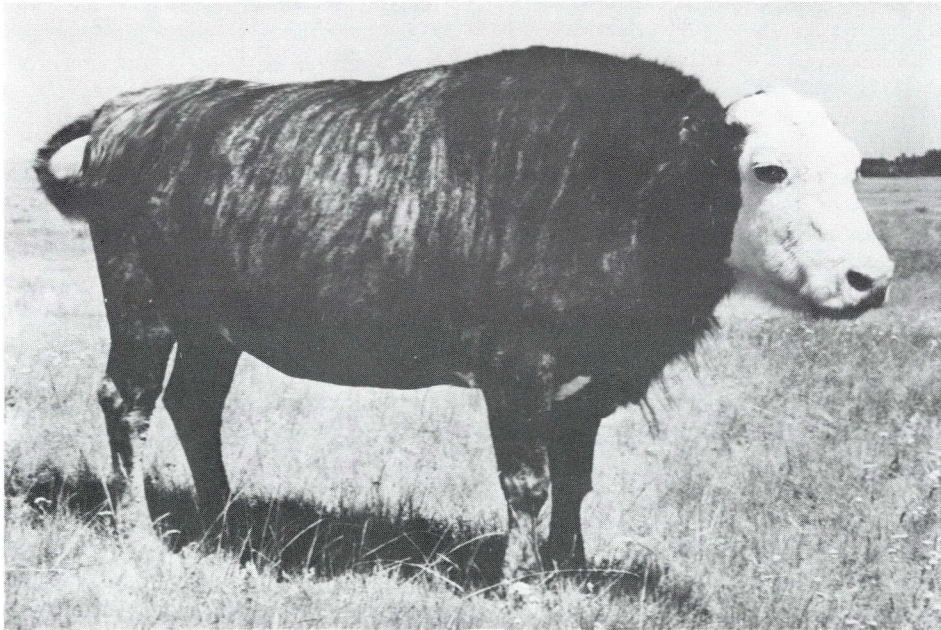
"Many of the calves born to crossbred cows were very small and weak and there were fewer male than female offspring. Over-all, one-quarter and one-half bison cows produced 20 percent fewer calves than the straight Herefords, and the rate of gain for bison and bison-cross calves was lower than for Herefords under feedlot conditions."

a higher percentage of bison outperformed those crosses which were only one-eighth to one-quarter bison.

"On northern ranches where cattle cannot be raised profitably, I think bison-cross beef animals could be very adaptable," Mr. Lawson says. "The heavy hair coat, proven hardiness and longevity of these animals can counteract the effects of the cold climate and the heavy insect infestations.

"Growth performance can be improved by choosing good cattle to breed with bison and by using a performance-selection program and artificial insemination, and upgrading a herd by culling the poorer animals.

"However, in less rigorous climates, a rancher can avoid management problems and obtain higher over-all performance by crossing cattle breeds rather than crossing bison with cattle."



A 21-year old cow, half bison, half Hereford.

native western bison, but the idea isn't new. This crossbreeding was observed in the 1700s and ranchers made attempts to get the two species to mate in the 1880s," he continues.

Agriculture Canada began to develop a bison-cattle herd in 1916 at Wainright, Alberta. Bison were crossed with Hereford, Angus, Shorthorn and Holstein cattle.

Under the Agriculture Canada project the new beef animals were known as cattalo. This name, taken from cattle and buffalo, reflects a common misnomer, since the North American buffalo are not really buffalo — they're properly called bison.

In 1950 the experimental cattalo herd was moved to the research sub-station at Manyberries, Alberta. In 1965, after the federal researchers had assessed the animals' performance under range conditions, the herd was sold.

Mr. Lawson points out there were also problems persuading the bulls and cows of the two species to mate. However, this problem could be overcome by using artificial insemination.

Most of the bison crossbred bulls had low fertility and only a few with three-sixteenths bison were fertile. Bulls greater than three-sixteenths bison were not fertile.

Advantages

On the plus side, part-bison animals were more hardy and cold-resistant than ordinary cattle and had thicker and heavier hair.

Also, while the birth weight of bison-cattle calves was often lower, by weaning time many of these calves had surpassed the Herefords. Many hybrid cows (one-half bison) produced calves for more than 25 years.

Generally speaking, the crosses with

Bay of Fundy tidal power study

In a recent joint statement the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Donald S. Macdonald, the Premier of Nova Scotia, Gerald A. Regan and the Premier of New Brunswick, Richard Hatfield announced that the three governments had accepted in principle the recommendations of a tidal power review board related to the Bay of Fundy.

The board's report, tabled in the House of Commons by Mr. Macdonald, proposes that a study program be undertaken at a total cost of \$3 million with an initial phase over a two-year period to cost \$1.3 million. The scope of this initial program would include site selection and the optimization of energy production as well as electric power market and transmission studies.

Mr. Macdonald noted that, in 1969, a joint federal-provincial study under the Atlantic Tidal Power Programming Board had concluded that the economic development of tidal power in the Bay of Fundy was not feasible in the prevailing circumstances. In February 1972, the two provinces and the Federal Government established a tidal power review board to re-examine the conclusion of the 1960 study in the light of current and projected conditions. The three governments are now discussing in detail the procedures for taking action on the study proposals.