

How Now, Pet Cow?

Miniature cattle aren't just for eating **BY SHAUN O'DELL**

Seeing them for the first time, passers-by might wonder if they've suddenly been transported to Munchkin Land: Are those cute little cows I'm staring at really full-grown? Only 39 inches tall at the shoulder, miniature cattle are the stock and trade of many small acreage farmers learning to cut their teeth in the farming business. Raised for milking or beef, as a hobby or even as pets, miniature cattle are a versatile option for homeowners who have some extra property. Plus, breeders say you get more ribeye steaks per pound than with full-size cattle.

Beth Chudoba, of J & B Lowlines, breeds and raises Lowline cattle. Lowlines (sometimes known as Lowline Angus cattle) were originally bred in Australia from the black Aberdeen Angus cattle line in Scotland. Because there is no dwarfism gene in cattle as there is in many other miniature animals, the breed was selectively shrunk down to the size they are today.

But although they are smaller than standard cattle, they're still bigger than the average house pet. Packing up to 1,300 pounds on their 3 1/2 ft. tall frames, Lowlines are still pretty hefty animals. However, their disposition will likely quell any fears, breeders say. "Commercial bulls are frightening, but I don't think twice about going out in a field with a Lowline bull," Chudoba said.

Chudoba also believes that her animals are smarter than many people give them credit for. "The common perception is that

cows are stupid, and they're not. They will do almost anything that you ask them to. We don't use any electric devices. We don't rodeo. All of our cows are trained to follow a bucket. I can lead a herd of 40 with a bucket," Chudoba said, adding, "The way that commercial cattle are is because of the way they are raised. They don't develop a fear unless they've been shown a reason to be afraid."

Lowline fans also say the smaller cattle are more ecofriendly. With commercial cattle there can be issues of punching holes in the soil and creating rivers of waste due to massive consumption of grass and feed. Miniature cattle like Lowlines consume less than half the food of commercial cattle, according to Chudoba. "For a full-size cow, 3 percent of hay for body-weight per day is the average. The same amount for Lowlines, 3 percent of body-weight, is way too much. Our Lowlines were waddling when we fed them 3 percent. Even 1.5 percent is more than they need sometimes."

This difference can prevent some of the major issues that plague commercial farmers, including the high cost of feed. Lowlines can just be grass-fed for their entire growth process, including the "finishing" process, during which most ranchers of standard size cattle give grain to beef up the cows for market.

Though good-natured, miniature cattle are not generally raised to be pets. They were initially bred to act as a resource for beef and milk, just like commercial



One of Beth Chudoba's Lowline calves

cattle. Only recently have hobby farmers begun to consider miniature cattle for anything but food or breeding. Others say the animals should stay livestock, not pets. One breeder didn't want to be associated with a "Pets" issue. He told *EW*, "There's a group of breeders that don't like to see miniature cattle as pets. I mean, these animals are some of my best friends, but sometimes you have to shoot your best friend in the head."

Eating your best friend aside, some Lowline aficionados even go so far as to say that no cow, even miniatures, should ever be considered gentle enough to be a pet. But Chudoba says it is possible with the right preparation. To keep a cow happy,

it has to have a friend: "You have to have some other hoofed animals. I don't care if it's a goat, a llama or a horse. You cannot put a herd animal by itself," she says.

However, she does caution prospective owners about purchasing a goat as a first choice to accompany cattle: "Goats are thought of as these great weed-eaters. But really, roses are first. And then comes any landscaping lying around."

To see some miniature animals in Eugene, check out the upcoming miniature horse show at Oregon Horse Center Aug. 14-16. Information on the show is at oregonhorsecenter.com and for more information on Lowline cattle, go to nwlowlne.com



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