

BEEF X DAIRY: WHICH BREED SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

When it comes to your targeted approach to beef x dairy, the beef breed you use matters. To optimize your beef x dairy premiums, it's important to weigh your options. While actual beef x dairy carcass trait research is still very limited, there are several general breed trends that can help you decide what might be your program best.

While these pros and cons can help guide your decision, it's still important to select the right sires to address your current situation and when you plan to capitalize on your beef x dairy premium.

ANGUS

Far and away the most common beef breed in the US, you have countless Angus options to use in your beef x dairy program. In fact, many other breeds have previously crossed with Angus to increase the prevalence of black coat color, add the polled trait, and to improve carcass quality. With that in mind, here are the pros and cons of the Angus breed.

+ Easy calvings

Good for dairy producers who want to make sure their cows freshen in with no troubles

+ Marbling

One of the breed's features, which results in higher quality beef

+ Small frame

Helps bring the larger frames of dairy cattle more in line with beef breed size. This benefits the packing plants that may have restrictions on the size of carcass they can handle.

+ Strong Performance

Angus is now documented to be one of the top breeds for both yearling growth and carcass weight.

- Lower birth weight

A pro, in terms of easy calvings for dairy producers, but may lead to a docked price from a calf buyer on day-old beef x dairy cross calves.

- Smaller ribeye area than other breeds

One of the downfalls of Holstein and Jersey carcasses is the ribeye size and shape. However, the Angus sires selected as part of the Alta BULLSEYE program all rank in the upper echelon of the breed for this trait.

LIMOUSIN | LIMFLEX

Limousin are traditionally a red, horned breed, and have become a popular choice for Jersey breeders because the breed's characteristics offer the right complement for Jerseys. However, the breed has also gained recent popularity in use on Holsteins. Most Limousin sires offered are actually LimFlex (Limousin x Angus). Here are the pros and cons of the Limousin breed as a whole.

+ Ribeye area

One of the top breeds for this trait, based on across-breed adjusted EPDs. The favorable Limousin ribeye area addresses the smaller size and elongated ribeye shape in dairy cattle, which improves overall uniformity from one beef x dairy cross carcass to the next

+ Growth and feed efficiency

Calf buyers are more likely to purchase again when calves achieve excellent growth rates

+ Breeding to Feeding Program offers additional marketing opportunities for calves

-Calving ease

Limousin and LimFlex will sire higher birth weights and more calving difficulty than Angus

- Marbling

Beef quality may not be as tender as some other breeds. However, the breed can work for beef x dairy because Jerseys are especially known for their excellent marbling. Also, the LimFlex sires (with Angus blood in the pedigree), may offer the marbling gained from the Angus breed.

- Fewer available sire options than in the Angus breed

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SIMMENTAL | SIM ANGUS

Traditionally red or yellow and also horned, the Simmental breed has also incorporated Angus genetics. Currently available are a variety of Simmental and SimAngus sires that offer the following trait qualities.

+ Ribeye area

A positive trait for dairy producers, since ribeye size and shape is one area of weakness on purebred Holstein and Jersey cattle

+ Carcass weight

Crosses well with Holsteins for an appropriately sized hanging carcass

+ Efficient growth

Growers prefer the beef x dairy cross animals that can efficiently build muscle

-Calving ease

Simmental and SimAngus will sire higher birth weights and more calving difficulty than Angus.

-Fewer available sire options than Angus

However, several SimAngus sires offer the benefits of both the Simmental and Angus breeds

-Several options are not homozygous black

If black coat color is necessary for your premium, be sure to check whether the sires you use are more likely to throw calves that are not fully black.

CHAROLAIS

More popular in western US breeding programs, Charolais cattle are among the higher performing, heaviest muscled animals of the US beef breed. Here are a few things to consider when choosing Charolais for your targeted approach to beef x dairy.

+/- Higher birth weight

A higher birth weight often leads to a more favorable premium when selling day-old calves.

However, that extra birth weight can come at the cost of calving difficulties. That means the Charolais breed is best suited to the milking herd

+ Size and growth

Charolais cattle are among the largest beef breeds, which delivers more pounds at yearling weight and carcass weight on the rail

- The calves probably won't be black

Remember that Charolais are not black, so if black coat color is a key part of obtaining your premium, this is not your best choice. Most Charolais-sired calves born from black cows will have a "buckskin" or "smoky" colored hide.

Regardless of the breed you choose for your targeted approach to beef x dairy, keep these points in mind:

1. **VISIT WITH YOUR CALF BUYER** to determine the best breed to meet their needs. If you can get a premium for using a specific beef breed, put a contract in place to go ahead and use the best genetics from that breed.
2. **SIRE FERTILITY MATTERS IN BEEF BULLS TOO.** When you're a working dairy operation, your milk check is probably your biggest income. To get more milk, you need to get cows pregnant. And since we know that sire fertility varies from one bull to the next, check with your trusted Alta advisor to see which sires offer the optimal chance at creating a beef x dairy pregnancy.
3. **USE THE RIGHT SIRES TO FIT YOUR GOALS.** The Alta BULLSEYE selection indexes are set up to address your current situation and future goals with beef x dairy – and there are various breeds that fit each index. These sires are elite among their respective breeds for the traits represented in each index. So use them with confidence to maximize your future profit potential.