

## Dexter cattle (Ireland)

Red Dexter cow



**Origin:** Dexter cattle were until recently considered a rare breed of cattle, and originated in the southwest of Ireland. They are the smallest of the European cattle breeds and they are believed to be a cross between the Kerry and other hardy mountain cattle of the region. The breed owes its name to a Mr Dexter, who was agent to Lord Hawarden who lived in County Tipperary from 1750. Dexter cattle were first introduced into England from Ireland in 1882. This Irish breed became so well established in Great Britain that the Kerry and the Dexter/Kerry Cattle Society was established in 1892. The breed virtually disappeared in Ireland but for a few enthusiasts who maintained some animals.

**Characteristics:** Dexter cattle have two recognised types: short-legged and long-legged. The short-legged types are more likely to be carriers of the chondroplasia gene and should not be bred to other short-legged types. Dexters are a dual-purpose breed being raised for both milk and beef. The breed is seen in three colours, predominantly black but red and dun are also found. While Dexters are typically horned, a polled strain is now available. Horns are moderately thick with black tips which grow outwards with a forward curve on the male and upwards on the female. Cows weigh about 300–350 kg, have an average milk yield of 3000 and 3600kg with 4% butterfat and 3.5% protein. Typical height of a cow is between 96 and 111cm at the rump (38-44 inches).

Black Dexter bull



Mature bulls weigh about 450 kg and are between 106 and 121cm at the rump (42- 48 inches). The breed is hardy, gentle, and easy to handle and are very versatile and tolerate a range of climates which is probably why they are found in a number of countries including North America, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. The cows rarely have trouble calving, and the calves are hardy, quick to their feet and easily reared. Dexter steers finish on grass at about 24 months. Supplementary feeding during the winter months and to 'finish' is recommended. Carcase weights of up to 220kgs can be achieved with a killing out percentage of over 56% possible.

**Products:** Properly 'finished' Dexter beef has a greater level of fat marbling than seen in modern supermarket beef. Dexter beef is now widely available from artisan producers in Ireland, UK, Australia and USA. Dexter milk is rich and similar to the Jersey and it is claimed to be more naturally homogenised due to the smaller fat globules. Soft cream cheese and yoghurts may be available in local hostelrys and farmer markets.

**Population number:** There are over 28,000 cattle registered with the Dexter Cattle Society in the UK which covers the UK and parts of the EU. An Irish Dexter Cattle Group, affiliated to the UK Society, has recently been established and there are societies in the USA, NZ and Australia.

For further information contact:

[www.dextercattle.co.uk](http://www.dextercattle.co.uk)

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