

Kerry cattle (Ireland)

Kerry cow



Origin: Kerry cattle are a rare breed of dairy cattle, native to Ireland. Kerry cattle, and their offshoot breed, the Dexter, are important representatives of the ancient livestock of Western Europe. Cattle of Kerry type may have been in Ireland since 3000 BC, although the first written description of such cattle is based on a story written in 800 AD. They were developed as a milking breed and were well suited to small subsistence farms in the south and west of Ireland. They cause less damage to soils in high rainfall areas than larger breeds. The introduction of new cattle breeds from England in the nineteenth century led to a decline of the breed. By 1983 there were approximately 200 pedigree Kerry cattle in the world, but through the efforts of the Kerry Cattle Society Ltd. and the Department of Agriculture, numbers have since increased. Kerry bulls of exceptional merit are available at AI stations. A herd of pedigree Kerry cattle are maintained in the Irish State owned estates at Muckross House and at Farmleigh.

Characteristics: Their coat is almost entirely black, sometimes with a little white on the udder. The horns are whitish with dark tips but most herds are now dehorned. Cows weigh about 350–450 kg, with an average milk yield of 3000 and 3700kg at 4% butterfat and 3.1% protein.

Kerry bull



Some cows are capable of yielding over 4500kg. The bull is similar in character to the cow, is usually docile and easily managed. The breed are extremely hardy and will out winter very well, growing a good coat of hair which keeps the cold out. Their agility enables them to travel safely over rough ground and they do little damage to the pastures. The cows rarely have trouble calving, and the calves are hardy, quick to their feet and easily reared. The bullocks fatten producing excellent beef, weighing up to 550 kg, but this may take 4 to 6 months longer than for other breeds.

Products: Apart from its food value, Kerry milk is recognised as having a health benefit for humans. The globules of butterfat in Kerry milk are much smaller than those found in other breeds, thus making it easier to digest. As a result it is ideal for feeding to babies, invalids and others with digestive problems. This makes Kerry milk eminently suitable for ice cream, cheese and yogurt and several artisan food products are available.

Population number: There are over 100 registered Kerry cattle herds in Ireland. There were approximately 500 Kerry cattle births registered each year since 2010. Also, there are a small number of herds in the USA, Canada and the UK.

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