

Everything Changes, Except His Natives From Salers to Native Milking Shorthorns at ENS

By Melissa Hart

"I don't milk any cows, I breed Heritage Shorthorns," stated Bobby Halcomb of Eagles Nest Shorthorns in Portland, Tennessee. "I grew up on a cow/calf operation with Salers and I didn't know what Native cattle were when I started this adventure."

The black cow craze began taking over the beef industry and Saler breeders began breeding their deep red cows to black bulls and "I'm not a black cow fan," explained Bobby. He wanted red cattle, so he tried beef shorthorns but was disappointed in the outcome. Standing at a shorthorn sale in Tennessee, a long-time friend of his father approached him and convinced him to consider Native Milking Shorthorns.

He headed out to purchase some Native cattle in nearby Hendersonville, "When I drove into Wilson Farms, owned by Mr. Wick Comer, he had 10-foot fences and I thought, Lord, what am I doin' here?" Bobby recollected.

Looking through the cattle, Bobby made a list of the cows he was interested in purchasing and took the list back to Mr. Comer. "When I gave him my list, he pulled out the biggest stack of registration papers I had ever seen and began looking the cattle up and said that I had a good eye for cattle because I had chosen all Native cattle except for one."

When it came down to price, Bobby had no idea what they were worth. He said, "Mr. Comer leaned back in his chair and said \$10,000 a piece would be a good price and I gulped. Then he said, how about we drop a zero and I agreed. He gave me a good start into the Native business."

Mothering ability, calving ease, high weaning weights, and cows with good udders are just a few of the attributes that attracted Bobby and other breeders to Native Milking Shorthorns. "I am a purist when it comes to breeding livestock, I want the purest lines there are and that's what I get with Natives."

In 2012, he began adding to his herd. "I bought my first Native bull from Paul Wheeler of Ridgeview Acres in Missouri and then the majority of my cattle came from Double H Farm in Hutchinson, Kansas owned by Michael Headings." To date, his herd consists of



WIX Miss Tennessee 146 is a great cow with tremendous mothering ability.

33 head of Registered Native Milking Shorthorns. Like all the Registered Natives, his cattle trace back to the 1822 Coates Herdbook without outcrosses.

Roy Lovaas, Hidden Hills Farms in Minnesota has a deep knowledge of bull pedigrees and was a great mentor for Bobby. He also credits the Heritage Shorthorn Society as a resource. "We are a tight-knit group, and we all want everyone to succeed," he commented.

Bobby waits until his heifers are two years old before breeding them, "This gives them adequate size and doesn't hinder their ability to reach genetic potential."

As in any breeding operation, cow families are paramount at Eagles Nest Shorthorns. Double H Princess Supreme N was a

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With their Saler herd their prefix was ENS which was Eagles Nest Salers. Keeping the prefix for his Native herd, it now stands for Eagles Nest Shorthorns. The Eagles Nest name was chosen because every year the Eagle returns to the nest and each year the nest grows a little bigger.

brood cow that Bobby purchased from Double H Shorthorns. Sired by Double H Pearls Gre Supreme N she is long, deep bodied, with a good udder, and great mothering ability. She has two daughters in the herd, one sired by Double H Stronghold Buddy N P and one by ENS Lincolns Lad N P, an Emeraldale Lincoln N P son. "I am pleased with both daughters and I'm particularly fond of the Buddy offspring," Bobby remarked.

Another cow family favorite is WIX Miss Tennessee 146 N P, sired by Twice Command 05-N-P and out of a Eionmor Port-O-Call 60H- N-P Daughter. She has a moderate frame with a compact udder and is exceptional in her milking ability. Bobby recalls a story pointing to her maternal traits, "She once had a heifer calf at her side and due to some extenuating circumstances, my father and I were late weaning the calf. We finally were able to wean the heifer then two days later she had a bull calf and never stopped milking." He continued, "She freshened right back, nursed that bull calf to the appropriate weaning date and neither her nor the calf suffered with any loss in body condition or size. Generally, I would prefer a dry period, however this was an unusual situation." She is still in the herd and Bobby has a heifer out of her. "She has done well with multiple breedings from my initial herd bull Ridgeview Annies Promise N P and Double H Luckys Star N. She is currently bred to ENS Lincolns Lad N P."

Another maternal great is Roan Tennessee N P sired by Double H GR Defender N. Bobby purchased her from Double H Shorthorns when they were downsizing their herd. "I absolutely loved this cow the first time I laid eyes on her. She was a light roan, very powerful, broody cow born in 2009. She did show a little bit more of a dairy frame when milking heavy but would have still been respected by beef breeders just the same." Bobby continued, "She was a very impressive cow that stamped her progeny with her distinct

roan coloring and unique marking on the face. My first glimpse of her was in 2017 and she had a gorgeous horned heifer sired by Double H Stronghold Buddy N P." He has the Buddy daughter in addition to a daughter sired by ENS Lincolns Lad N P, and a granddaughter, Luckys Strawberry N P, in the herd today.

Docility is another strong suit of the Native cattle. "I rely on my dad to help me out and I like the fact that they are docile and easy to work with." Bobby continued, "We also like that they are efficient in converting grass to protein."

Bull calves that are not sold for breeding are castrated and sold to a feedlot. Bobby has plans to collect bulls from some of his rarer genetics, "Novelty is the name of the game in the Native world. Having a bull that no one else has--that is the trick to success....sort of," Bobby chuckled.

He is still building his cow herd and would like to be at 40 head. Bobby explains, "My Golden Rule is I want to maintain two of every cow family that I have because you always need a backup in case something happens. And then after that, I will sell some females."

As a dual-purpose breed, some breeders will milk Natives but Bobby's long-term goal is to sell freezer beef and quality breeding stock.

"I'm very passionate about Natives and I am happy to help new breeders." Bobby continued, "They are listed on the critical list at the Nature Conservancy. The native cattle cannot be bred up to. In the Native breed we must maintain our purity, we can't have one outcross and maintain purity."

Bobby said he likes the steadiness, continuity, and consistency of Native Milking Shorthorns. He concluded, "Everything changes over time....except for my Natives."



Double H Princess Supreme N is a brood cow that Bobby purchased from Double H Shorthorns in Kansas.

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 Convention Updates**
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