



# BEEF BRIEFS

AMERICAN  
**Simmental**  
ASSOCIATION

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## History of the Simmental Breed

The Simmental is among the oldest and most widely distributed of all breeds of cattle in the world. Although the first official herdbook was established in the Swiss Canton of Berne in 1806, there is evidence of large, productive "red and white" cattle being found much earlier in ecclesiastical and secular property records of Western Switzerland. Those red and white animals were highly sought because of their "rapid growth development; outstanding production of milk, butter and cheese; and for their use as draught (draft) animals." They were known for their gentle nature, impressive stature and excellent dairy qualities.

As early as 1785, the Swiss Parliament limited exports because of a shortage of cattle to meet their own needs. The Swiss "Red and White Spotted Simmental Cattle Association" was formed in 1890. Since its origin in Switzerland, the breed has spread to all six continents. Total numbers are estimated between 40 and 60 million Simmental cattle worldwide, with more than half in Europe. The worldwide spread was gradual until the late 1960s. Records show that a few animals were exported to Italy as early as the 1400s. During the 19th century, Simmental were distributed through most of Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia, ultimately reaching South Africa in 1895. Guatemala imported the first Simmental cattle into the Western Hemisphere in 1897, with Brazil following in 1918 and Argentina in 1922.

There are unsubstantiated reports from a variety of sources indicating Simmental cattle arrived in the United States before the turn of the century. Simmental were reported as early as 1887 in Illinois, according to one source; in 1895 in New Jersey; and in New York and New Mexico around the 1916-1920 period. An ad in an 1896 issue of the *Breeder's Gazette*, published in Chicago, also made reference to "Simmenthal" cattle. Apparently, those early imports did not capture the imagination of the American

cattleman and the Simmental influence died quietly away until they were reintroduced in the late 1960s.

The breed made its most recent appearance in North America when a Canadian, Travers Smith, imported the famed bull "Parisien" from France in 1967. Semen was introduced into the United States that same year, with the first half-blood Simmental calf born at Geysers, MT, in February, 1968. The American Simmental Association was formed in October, 1968. Simmental spread to Britain, Ireland and Norway in 1970 and to Sweden and other Northern European countries shortly thereafter. The first purebred bull was imported into the United States in 1971 and Australia received Simmental semen and live animals in 1972. The World Simmental Federation (WSF) was formed in Zagreb, Yugoslavia in 1974. In 1976, Simmental cattle were shipped to the Republic of China. The purpose of the WSF was to unify Simmental breeders around the world and provide them with a vehicle through which they could exchange research and information and increase the influence and importance of the Simmental breed.

Selection in Europe was initially for three features . . . milk, meat and as draft animals. The demand for working animals is greatly reduced today but muscularity and high milk production are still important to the success of Simmental. The breed is known by a variety of names, including "Fleckvieh" in Germany; "Pie Rouge", "Montbeliarde", and "Abondance" in France; and "Pezzata Rosa" in Italy. The Simmental name is derived from their original location, the Simme Valley of Switzerland. In German, Thal or Tal means valley, thus the name literally means "Simme Valley".

Simmental have a number of important attributes. They are widely distributed throughout the world, implying adaptability to varied environments and management practices. They have continued to thrive

over hundreds of years, implying utility, functional efficiency and productivity; and they are second in numbers, only to Brahman, among all breeds worldwide.

The American Simmental Association (ASA) was founded by a contingent of breeders who came from other breed backgrounds and shared a common goal of establishing a breed base on sound, performance principles. Thus, in its 30+ years of existence, ASA has often been in the forefront of beef industry innovation and progress. In 1971, ASA published the first beef breed sire summary, and since that time has: 1) initiated a cow recognition program; 2) developed Simbrah, a heat tolerant, insect-resistant breed combining the genetics of Simmental and Brahman; 3) developed the first multi-breed EPDs; 4) been a leader in incorporating performance data into the show ring; and, 5) more recently, established the industry standard for proving carcass merit. Most other breeds have followed the leadership of ASA. The growth of Simmental cattle in North America is really a reflection of what has already occurred in most agricultural countries of the world. It appears certain that Simmental will continue to play an important role in the future of the American beef producer.

### ***Why American Simmental?***

#### **Emphasis Upon Beef Production**

Only in the United States are Simmental measured and selected totally for efficient, economical production of quality beef. Unlike most of the European performance programs involving Simmental cattle where emphasis is on the measurement of milk production, ASA has developed performance programs that focus on meat production.

As a result of performance programs, the ASA was the first breed association to publish a sire summary. The American Simmental resulting from this effort meets today's demand for a beef animal that can thrive under a variety of conditions. They have bred-in ability to adapt to hot and cold temperatures, to dry or humid climates, to range conditions or confinement rearing.

***The American Simmental is genetically engineered toward efficient, economical production of tender, lean, palatable beef -- the product in demand by consumers today.***

#### **Breeder Selectivity**

Changing the genetic composition of any breed has traditionally been a slow and painstaking process. Often times this has been further hindered by restrictive policies or practices that were unrelated to the goal of profitable beef production.

The American Simmental Association has been innovative and flexible in allowing for breeder selectivity in all programs. Furthermore, no color restrictions are imposed. Performance has always been given far greater emphasis than color or other superficial attributes.

#### **A Blend Of The Best - The American Simmental**

America has been known as the melting pot of nationalities. The same concept is true for the Simmental breed. European countries have specialized in the development of particular strains and traits of Simmental. A great deal of pride is associated with the product that has been developed by each country, and, in some cases, by specific herdbooks within countries. Only in America has there been an opportunity for an expansive within-breed blending or melting-pot effect to take place.

The result has been greater performance and productivity because only the best cattle coming from the various countries are utilized in the composition of the superior American Simmental. The resulting product is capable of expressing the superior traits from all European strains, providing for even greater flexibility and opportunities for innovative and creative cattle breeders.

#### **American Simmental Have Evolved From a Wide Genetic Base**

Only a small proportion of any generation is truly genetically superior. The larger the population base, the greater the potential for selection of superior individuals. Through innovative programs, such as performance testing, carcass evaluation, total herd enrollment and a nationwide sire summary evaluation, the opportunity to select for improvement of economically important traits is enhanced ever more.