Facts about Zebu Cattle

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The name Zebu was taken from the Tibetan word Zen or Zebras which means "the hump of the camel". The word Zebu has been used worldwide for the last 250 years to refer to Bos indicus cattle. The external feature which distinctly separates Zebu from European type cattle is the hump present over the shoulders or the posterior part of the neck. The hump consists of muscle, connective tissue, and variable amounts of fat. The size and shape of the hump varies by breed, sex, and age of the animal. The function of hump was not clearly understood and it was assumed to be a store of fat for use during periods of food scarcity. The word Zebu has been used to mean the hump of the camel. The word Zebu has been used to mean the hump of the camel. The word Zebu has been used to mean the hump of the camel.

Origin and Distribution

Reports indicate that Zebu cattle descended from Bos indicus, a wild cattle found in the Indian Pleistocene era. From the center of origin, Bos indicus cattle migrated across tropical Asia and later to Africa, America, and Australia. Nearly half of the world's Zebu population is estimated in Asia. In most Asian countries, Zebu cattle have remained nondescriptive breeds, such as Indigenous Zebu in Bangladesh, Kedah-Kelantan cattle in Malaysia and Lankan Zebu in Sri Lanka. However, in India, the Zebu population primarily consists of well-known dairy breeds such as Gyr, Haryana, Kankrej, Ongole (Nellore), Red Sindhi, Sahiwal and Tharparkar. The three original strains of Indian cattle (Guzerat, Nellore and Gyr) used to develop the Brahman breed are still present in substantial numbers and are used in the development of new breeds, such as InduBrazil, Canchin, Jamaica Hope, Siboney, Santa Gertrudes, Brangus, Beefmaster and Simbrah. The Nellore (Ongole), Gyr and Guzerat (Kankrej) breeds are also present in substantial numbers in South America.

The African cattle population originated from three major introductions from Asia during the period from 4500 to 2500 BC. These include B. taurus, humpless hornless longhorn (B. taurus longiformis), humpless shorthorn (B. taurus brachyceros), and humped Zebu (B. indicus). From these breeds, well-known African cattle breeds such as Boran, Kenana, Butana, White Fulani, and Anderican were evolved. Boran has gained a good reputation as a dual-purpose breed with improved meat and milk production. A large number of cattle have remained nondescriptive Zebu breeds.

The Zebu cattle found in Oceania including Australia originated mainly from cattle introduced from India, Pakistan, South Africa and the United States. The Brahman breed was used in the development of the United States.

After Asia, the next largest populations of Zebu are found in South America and Africa, accounting for approximately half of the total world Zebu population.

Characteristics

Bos indicus animals are well adapted to the tropics and have been selected to cope with the harsh environments of tropical countries. Zebu cattle have the ability to move their skin to repel ticks. It is only in this part of the world that there is a lack of tick control. Zebu cattle have a lower metabolic rate and can survive in lower temperatures. Zebu cattle have high fertility and can survive under harsh and unfavorable climatic conditions. Zebu cattle are highly resistant to disease and have a lower degree of human interference and the latter provides ample scope for genetic improvement.

Productive Performance

Size of the animals varies greatly with mature cows weighing from 450 to 2500 kg and average weight being 650 kg. Calving interval ranges from 15 to 24 months and average weight at birth is 280 to 650 kg. Calving interval ranges from 200 to 1500 kg. Age at first calving is 25 to 35 months, and lactation length from 180 to 240 days. The rate of these variations in productive and reproductive performance suggest that there are genetic differences between animals in their genotype, nutrition, location, management and climatic factors.

The potential for milk production is poorly developed in most Zebu cattle. The milk yield's low fat content is one of the problems that need to be fed correctly. The cow usually does not eat well and this stimulates the production of milk. The milk yields vary widely, with the highest yields occurring in Zebu cattle in their native habitats. Zebu cattle have high fertility and can survive under harsh and unfavorable climatic conditions. Zebu cattle are highly resistant to disease and have a lower degree of human interference and the latter provides ample scope for genetic improvement.

Reproductive Characteristics

The information available does not suggest that there are any great differences in reproductive physiology between Z. taurus and B. taurus cattle. Zebu cattle are reared under poor management and a lower degree of human interference. The information available does not suggest that there are any great differences in reproductive physiology between Z. taurus and B. taurus cattle. Zebu cattle are reared under poor management and a lower degree of human interference.