

Dean Schocker

Mini Corn Patch

New Liberty, IA

An Interview with Dean Schocker, taken from the January 2013 IMZA CoN\*Nection Newsletter

By Maureen Neidhardt, Former IMZA Registrar and Newsletter Editor

In about 1990, I got together with Paul Seabold of Keokuk, IA, to buy a pot-bellied pig. These little pigs were becoming hugely popular, and being an early owner in a new endeavor was important. Mr. Seabold also introduced me to miniature zebu cattle and explained that they were very few in numbers and quite costly but that one could get involved in raising them by buying a bull and breeding them to Jersey heifers. I found some jersey heifers and bought a bull from Paul. My project was "on the way," so to speak.

Getting involved in an upbreeding program such as this requires less up-front capital, but one must be prepared to invest a lot of time and a lot of feed in developing a herd. Anyhow, I bred those Jerseys and got my first percentage (50% ) calves. I bottle-fed all of the calves for several years. I would halterbreak them and make them gentle. This came in handy if a cow needed to be caught for hoof trimming or vet work. It seems like once they are broke to lead at a young age, they never forget it.

After I got a job in the factory, I stopped bottle feeding, as it was too labor-intensive. Also, it is not a good idea to bottle-feed a bull, though the one bull, Toby, that I still have, was bottle-fed; I did not interact with him as a pet, and he has not given me a problem yet. I keep in mind to never trust a bull.

While I was bottle feeding, I would leave the calf with the mother for three days and then pull them. The cow's milk would gradually dry up. I would then take the cows out to a rented pasture away from the buildings and the calves. There were coyotes out there, and I didn't think the small calves would fare well there. I also ran donkeys with the cows to help with the coyote problem. Donkeys can be hard on small calves, but they don't harm the older cows.

I also had a better conception rate with no calves and the cows on nice green grass. I kept the heifers for replacement cows and sold the bull calves as pets at that time. With each generation of saving the heifers, I would work toward getting calves closer to Native Pure in status (15/16ths miniature zebu for heifers; and 31/32nds for bulls). The first generation would be 1/2 or 50%; second generation would be 3/4 or 75%; third generation would be 7/8 or 87.5%; fourth generation would be 15/16th or 93.75%; fifth generation they can be requested to be deemed Foundation Pure. As I would sell off the older, lower-percentage cows, I would buy Foundation Pure cows.

I bought bulls from Harlan Ball, Dick and Kathy Heiken, Robert V. "Bob" Baker, Dennis Beranek; and last year I bought Van Lue from Bob Balensiefen. I still try to keep all heifer calves as replacements for the cows I sell. I have not been selling bull calves for pets any more. If a bull is not suitable for a herd

sire, I feed them out like regular beef cattle and butcher them at about 18 months of age. The meat tastes the same as any other beef breed--just comes in smaller cuts.

During the 20 years plus that I worked at the upbreeding program, the numbers of Foundation Pure miniature zebu were steadily growing. Along with the growth in numbers, there was also much growth in desirability and affordability. We were starting to see more color introduced to the breed, and breeders who sought out the color and bred for it in turn created more of the colorful little zebus. All in all, the breed has come a long way since the registry was first formed on a small genetic base of animals. The opportunity to buy fine-quality Foundation Pure cattle is definitely here. Anyone who wishes to own miniature zebu cattle will find them affordable and with a wide selection of quality animals to choose from. The idea of upbreeding to get more pure animals is no longer needed, so "getting into" raising miniature zebu cattle is much easier than it was in the early years of the IMZA.

I am a founding member of the IMZA, which started in 1991. I have served on the Board of Directors and have served as President. I am currently on the committee for reviewing the Hardship Applications, a.k.a., Alternative Registration process. You will note that I have remained steadfast to raising the miniature zebu cattle through over 20-plus years, which is a tribute to their satisfying my bovine experience!!