

## © Document B-60

### Cows used in kosher beef production

March 2004

#### Introduction

In the 1950's the *Chazon Ish* ruled that one should not eat Zebu, a breed of cow that chews its cud and has split hooves, because he had no *mesorah* regarding its *kashrus*. Others, including the OU, argue that *mesorah* isn't required in this case.<sup>1</sup> Much of the kosher beef sold in *Eretz Yisroel* is *shechted* in South America, and it has recently come to light that the animals used include ones bred from Zebu (directly or indirectly). After much deliberation, Rav Elyashiv and Rav Nissim Karelitz issued a joint *psak* that meat already *shechted* is kosher *l'chatchilah* (because *rov* of the animals have no trace of Zebu) but in the future animals will be checked before they are *shechted*.<sup>2</sup> [The bulk of kosher beef sold in the USA is *shechted* in the USA or Canada, and only a small percentage comes from South America]. The following is background information for the issue.

With the exception of the coming section by Rabbi Kravitz, the text and pictures are from Encyclopedia Britannica and much of it is from a chart in the encyclopedia entitled "Selected Breeds of Beef Cattle"<sup>3</sup> and the rest is from entries in the Encyclopedia on each breed. [The term "Polled" refers to cows that have no horns].

<sup>1</sup> For more on this issue see © B-52-55 & B-22.

<sup>2</sup> The following is the English version of their *psak* as printed in the 26 *Adar* 5764 March 19, 2004 edition of the Israeli, English *Yated Ne'eman*:  
21 *Adar* 5764

After conducting inquiries to the best of our ability, we hereby publicize the opinion of Maran HaGaon HaRav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv *shlita* and HaGaon HaGadol Hagavad of Ramat Aharon R' Nissim Karelitz *shlita*.

Maran the Chazon Ish had issued a decisive ruling regarding a breed of cattle called zebu. As clarified in the *Shach* (*Yoreh Deah* 80, 11) the custom is not to eat those types of cattle for which no tradition has been handed down (see *Chochmas Odom*), and therefore he firmly opposed bringing this breed to Eretz Yisroel.

Now it has been shown that some of the meat imported from South America is from cattle of this breed, or from cows that were crossbred with this breed (although no difference is now apparent) which does not conform to the tradition.

Therefore those involved in the matter should make certain to *shecht* cattle that do not raise any concerns. Regarding those that have already been *shechted*, experts have ascertained that in Argentina and Uruguay the majority (*rove*) of the cattle do not show any change and most of them (*rove*) do not have any concerns of crossbreeding, therefore the meat *shechted* there is permitted for consumption *lechatchiloh*.

Signed,  
Yitzchok Mordechai HaKohen Rubin, Har Nof  
Dovid Aryeh Morgenstern  
Moshe Mordechai Karp  
YN

<sup>3</sup> "Selected Breeds of Beef Cattle." *Encyclopedia Britannica* from Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 Ultimate Reference Suite CD-ROM. Copyright © 1994-2003 Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. March 16, 2004.

case where there was truly a need for a mesorah according to the Chazon Ish and none existed. To my knowledge there are no other recent responsa that address this *Pri Maggadim* vs. Chazon Ish dispute.

Although the debate was not relevant here, there are certainly species where it would have ramifications. For example in 1993 a new species of animal was discovered in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> The wild saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensi*, also known as the Vu Quang bovid) is the first large land vertebrate discovered in more than 50 years. Despite its being Old World there is clearly no tradition regarding its kosher status. It seems to be an unusual antelope with long, straight horns. Scientists are unsure even how to classify it. Originally it was put in a new genus in the bovine group together with oxen and elands. Now some people are grouping it with goats.<sup>23</sup> Either way, this odd, elusive creature that is possibly on the verge of extinction exhibits both kosher indicia and yet lacks a *mesorah* - a perfect test case for this debate.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> See V.V. Dung, et al, Nature 363, 443-445; 1993.

<sup>23</sup> See Nature, 396, 410; December 3, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Nothing is known about its ability to hybridize.

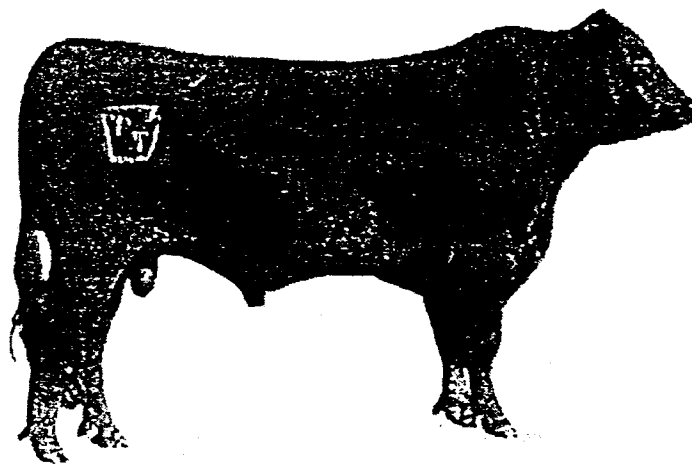
## Breeds used in American kosher meat

Rabbi Kravitz and a *frum* cattle breeder reviewed the breeds listed in Encyclopedia's table and reported that that 85-90% of the cattle used in the USA are a form of Angus (Black Angus, Red Angus), the rest are mostly Hereford (White Hereford, Polled Hereford). They also have a small amount of Charolais and Limousin. And of course there is a lot of inter-breeding of these together, especially the Angus with the Hereford. In Canada, the Simmental is used very much, but it's not used here in the USA. The Normande could be acceptable, but it's not found here. All these look very much alike, none have any humps, nor hanging neck skin etc. All the other ones are not used, (and would possibly not be acceptable, since they all have some sort of hump etc. which is quite visible).

He was told that it is common knowledge throughout the industry, that the cattle in South American countries are predominantly Zebu/Brahman, and they differ greatly from the American cattle. They are cattle that can withstand the high heat temperatures, which the American ones could not. He was also informed by someone in the meat industry for many years, that years ago they wanted to *shecht* these Brahman/Zebu (or a form of them) here in the US, (in Florida and Texas,) but that the Satmar Rov *Zichrono Livracha* did not allow it.

### Angus

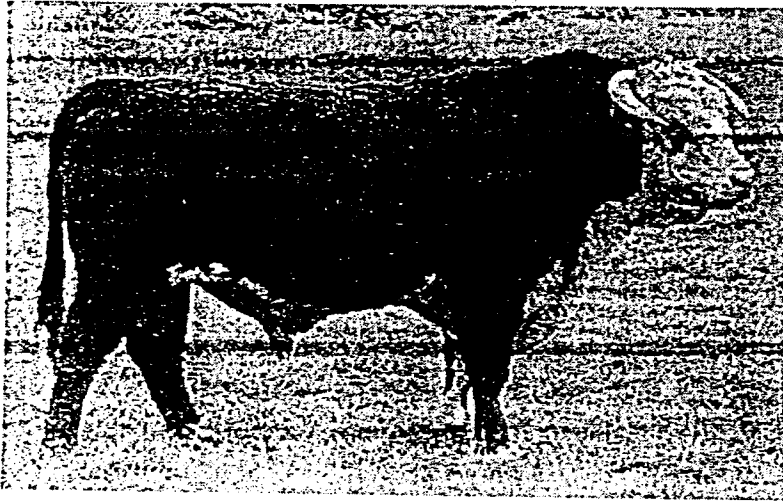
The characteristic features of the breed are black color, polled head, compact and low-set body, fine quality of flesh, and high dressing percentage. The Angus is a beef breed of the highest rank, and for years purebred or crossbred Angus steers have held high places of honor at the leading fat-stock shows in Great Britain and the United States. This breed was introduced into the United States in 1873, and after that date its influence spread widely there and in other countries. Within the breed, a strain known as Red Angus was gaining in popularity in the late 20th century, particularly for purposes of out crossing and crossbreeding. The Brangus, developed from Brahman and Angus stocks, is notable for its resistance to heat (see below).



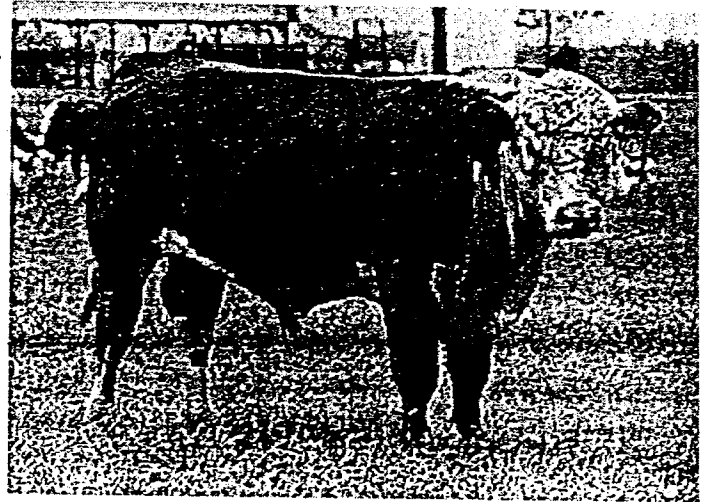
BLACK ANGUS BULL

## Hereford and Polled Hereford

Hereford is originally from England, now also in U.K., North & South America, Australia and New Zealand. It is red and white; low-set and compact. Polled Hereford is originally from the U.S. and is now widespread. It is muscular and hornless.



HEREFORD



POLLED HEREFORD

## Charolais

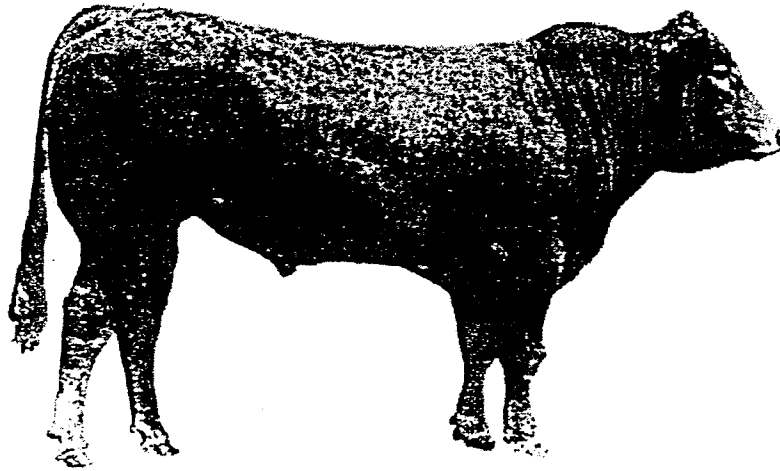
A typical Charolais is massive and horned and cream-colored or slightly darker. The breed was first imported into the United States from a herd in Mexico in 1936, but few were later imported because of disease problems of those breed in France. The Charolais is crossbred with beef breeds and dairy cows; the Charbray, a mixture of Charolais and Brahman, is a notable example.



CHAROLAIS

## Limousin

The Limousin breed is originally from France but is now also used in North America. It is red-gold, long-bodied and horned.



LIMOUSIN

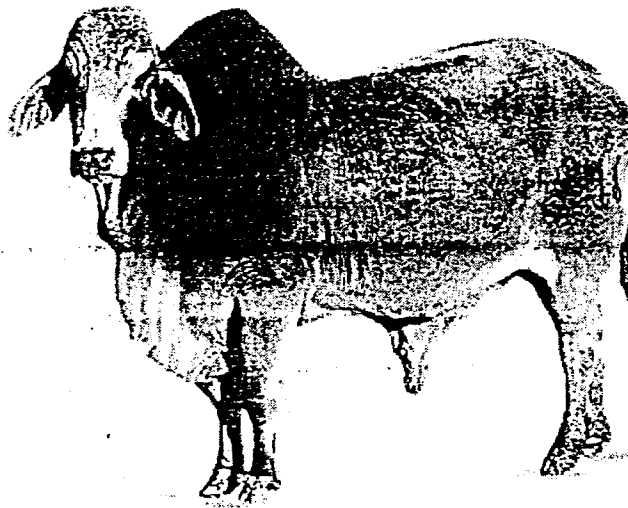
## Brahman/Zebu and Brangus

### Brahman/Zebu

Brahman also called Zebu, refers to any of several varieties of cattle originating in India and crossbred in the United States with improved beef breeds, producing the hardy beef animal known as the American Brahman. Similar blending in Latin America resulted in the breed known as Indo-Brazil. Indian cattle were first imported into the Western Hemisphere in the mid-19th century. The Gir, Gujarat, and Nellore varieties were particularly successful in the southern United States and in Brazil, where heat, humidity, and pests made northern European breeds less profitable.

The Hereford and the Shorthorn were among the first breeds used in crossing and have remained popular. Beef of these mixtures, such as the Beefmaster, is markedly low in fat. Other notable crosses include the Charbray, from the Brahman and Charolais, and the Brangus, from the Brahman and Angus. Pure-bred Brahmans today are used primarily for breeding and seldom slaughtered.

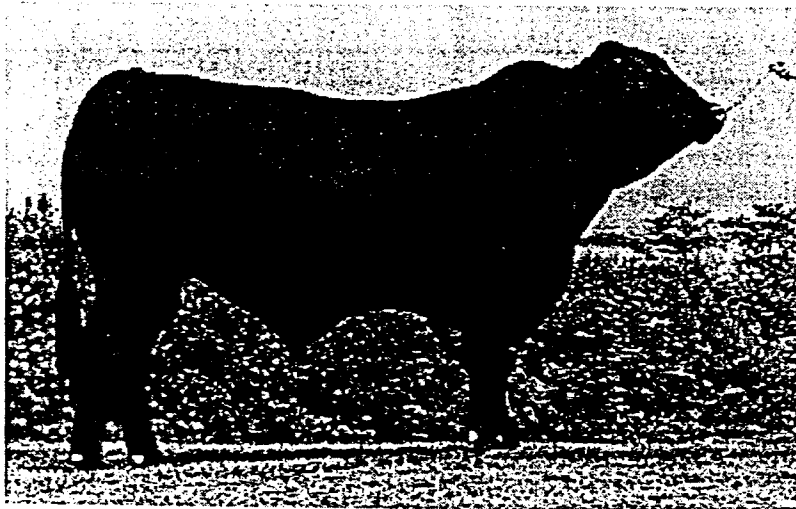
The Brahman is characterized by a pronounced hump over the shoulder and neck, horns that usually curve up and back, and drooping ears. These features may be present to a lesser extent in the mixtures. Gray is the prevalent color, with deep shading in the fore and rear quarters of the bull; a solid red strain has also been developed.



BRAHMAN/ZEBU

### Brangus

The Brangus breed was developed in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s by crossing Brahman and Angus cattle. The breed has been standardized with three-eighths Brahman and five-eighths Angus breeding. The Brangus generally have the hardiness of the Brahman for Southern conditions but the improved carcass qualities of the Angus. It is large, black, hornless and straight-backed. [Note the similarity to the Black Angus pictured above].



BRANGUS