

## Belted Beauties: Belted Galloway Cattle

**With its weather-resistant coat and charming coloration, the Belted Galloway is a tough, adaptable breed that thrives on small farms.**

By Cherie Langlois

Dressed in black and white, admired and photographed by passing tourists, the famous stars of Aldermere Farm are nonetheless down-to-earth sorts who seem to savor the simple life: dining al fresco, feeling the winter sun on their backs, chewing their cud.

OK, they're beef cattle, not movie stars, but they really have garnered plenty of camera-toting fans.

Photo by Rhoda Peacher  
In fact, Ron Howard, manager of this well-known Rockport, Maine, farm, believes Aldermere's Belted Galloway cattle could possibly have the distinction of being the most-photographed bovines in the world.

Not surprising given their Panda-ish colors and striking patterns: black separated by a broad, white belt around the middle of their sturdy bodies.

Give them a backdrop of vivid spring greenery, golden summer grass, autumn leaves in flaming hues or winter's austere white drifts, and you have one of the loveliest rural scenes imaginable. A scene—and a cattle breed—you likely won't forget as long as you live.

Trish Smith, a Graham, Wash., hobby farmer who grew up in Ohio and often visited nearby Camden, Maine, with her family, certainly never forgot Aldermere and its Belties.

Photo by Jeanmfogle.com

### Beltie Basics

To learn more about Belties or to find a breeder, check out the Belted Galloway Society website at [www.beltie.org](http://www.beltie.org) or the Western Belted Galloway Association at [www.beltedgalloway.org](http://www.beltedgalloway.org).

Pay a visit to the farms featured in this article:

Aldermere Farm, [www.aldermere.org](http://www.aldermere.org)

Caldwell Farms, [www.beltiebeef.com](http://www.beltiebeef.com) or [www.caldwellfarms.com](http://www.caldwellfarms.com)

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Established in 1953 by Albert Chatfield Jr., who bequeathed it to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust in 1999, Aldermere Farm preserves the oldest continuously operated herd of Belted Galloways in the United States. Read more about the Belties' strengths>> At any time of year, a portion of the 75- to 100-head herd can be seen grazing lush pastures on either side of Russell Avenue.

Recently, after a poignant reunion to scatter her parents' ashes off the Maine coast, Smith introduced her two grown daughters to the "Oreo" cattle she'd loved watching as a child.

"Someday I'm going to have some," Smith vows as she eyes her 5-acre pasture back home, currently occupied by horses. "I've wanted these cattle ever since I first saw them as a kid."

These belted beauties can't help but have that kind of effect on people; however, Belted Galloways possess more than cute faces and pretty exteriors—something you'll quickly discover if you take the time to get acquainted with them.

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A Rare History

Born amongst the moors, rocky hills and woodlands of southwestern Scotland, the Belted Galloway breed developed during the 16th century in an ancient district known as Galloway.

Some sources think the name Galloway stems from the old Scottish word “Gallovaid” which means “a Gaul,” a reference to the first people believed to reside there. In this rough and often rain-lashed area, a robust breed of Celtic cattle, usually polled (hornless) and possessing a shaggy black coat, had eked out an existence for hundreds of years.

Although no one knows for sure, these blocky Galloway cattle—thought to be the oldest of beef breeds—may have been crossed with imported Dutch Belted dairy cattle, also called Lakenvelders, to give us the Belted Galloway.

According to the U.S. Belted Galloway Society, the first Belties came to the United States in 1939, when Alice McLean of New York imported a bull and a dozen bred heifers from Great Britain.

Tragically, about 10 years later an unscrupulous herdsman butchered and sold off the rare cattle as black-market beef when she was away in England.

The next batch arrived in 1950, brought from Scotland to Hapwood Farm in Pennsylvania by Harry Prock, who went on to found the American Belted Galloway Breeders Association in 1951 with two more Beltie enthusiasts, Charles Wells of Michigan and H. Gordon Green of Quebec.

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Coming to the United States

During the 1950s, a handful of other Beltie breeders joined the organization, including Aldermere’s Albert Chatfield Jr. and General James A. Van Fleet, who at the time operated Withlacoochee Farm in Florida. In 1964, they incorporated under the name Belted Galloway Society, Inc.

Bringing Belties in from their native Scotland was expensive, costing about \$7,000 per animal, so few cattle raisers kept them, notes Jane Faul, a veteran Beltie breeder in Battletown, Ky., with some 30 years’ experience.

During the 1970s, she had stumbled upon a photograph of the striking breed accompanied by an article billing Belties as “the lazyman’s cattle” because of their self-sufficiency.

“I thought, ‘I can go for that,’” she recalls. “But at the point when I came in, if you wanted to get into Belties you had to spend three or four months on the phone trying to find someone who wanted to part with one. It took me five months to get five animals together, and I was lucky to find them.”

Only about 100 Belties had journeyed to North America when the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, also known as mad cow disease) outbreak in Great Britain put a stop to live imports in 1989. Even though breeders could still import semen and embryos for their breeding programs, Belties remained scarce.

The commercial beef industry’s emphasis on uniform cattle with large frames and rapid growth did little to help boost the breed’s numbers.

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy’s (ALBC) 1994 book *Taking Stock: The North American Livestock Census* listed Belted Galloways in the “rare” category on their Conservation Priority List, meaning the breed had an estimated global population of less than 5,000 and fewer than 1,000 registrations in North America.

Thanks to the efforts of its enthusiastic supporters, though, the Beltie’s popularity—and population—has grown in recent years as more people discover this unique breed and its exceptional meat.

Today, Belted Galloways have moved up into the ALBC’s “recovering” category, which means the organization estimates these cattle have exceeded the “watch” category’s global population of 10,000 or less and fewer than 2,500 registrations in North America, but they still need to be monitored. What’s even more heartening: Faul thinks the breed’s worldwide population could be closer to 30,000.

The U.S. Belted Galloway Society itself currently has more than 10,000 active animals in its registry, and the organization that started with three individuals now stands at 1,000 Beltie-loving members strong.

About the Author: Cherie Langlois is an HF contributing editor who writes from her hobby farm in Washington.

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