

MISHIMA CATTLE (JAPAN)

Mishima cow



Mishima bull



Origin: Mishima cattle have been considered the oldest type of Japanese native cattle and conserved as national monument on a small island, Mishima Island, in the Sea of Japan, 44 km north-west of Hagi, Yamaguchi Prefecture, the southernmost area of the main island, Honshu. It is likely that in 500 AD the cattle being raised in northern China were first brought to Japan through the Korean peninsula. The cattle were widely reared and were mainly used for farm work. In the Meiji era (1852 to 1912) exotic breeds of beef cattle were imported to increase body size and to shorten the maturity period of native Japanese cattle across the country except Mishima Island which was isolated from the mainland due to the distance. Only Mishima cattle were kept untainted without being cross-bred with the exotic breeds. Since 1928 when Mishima cattle were named as national monument, breeding of the cattle with other breeds has been prohibited. Today there are 83 cattle including a few bulls, which are being reared by eight marginal farmers. Since the cattle have long been bred in a confined population, the fear of intensive inbreeding has been becoming an issue.

Characteristics: Mishima cattle are smaller than Japanese Black cattle; the height of the withers is

1.17 m for females and 1.25 m for males on the average. They are known for their late maturity. It takes three to six years for them to mature and they often continue to grow until they are 8 years old. The cattle are calm, easy to train and healthy and have a high tolerance to disease. These characteristic are suitable for draft animals. Mishima cattle are known to have genes to produce well-marbled meat. Frozen semen from Mishima bulls is produced and utilized for cross-breeding with Holstein Friesian cattle. The cross-bred cattle are called Mishima-Holstein cattle “Ken Ran Gyu” and known for their quality meat.

Product: It is not allowed for farmers to sell their cows except for culling due to old age. Most male calves are castrated and sold for meat.

Population: According to the record from 2011, there were 72 cows, 5 bulls, and 6 calves on Mishima Island. Japanese government and local governments have been financially supporting the farmers to rear Mishima cattle to conserve the genes.

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