

Neighbors work to promote Piedmontese

By Sara Bredesen

Regional Editor

WILD ROSE — When Sally and Keith Schnese of Wild Rose were looking for a way to add value to their mixed-breed cow/calf herd about eight years ago, they didn't have far to go to find what they thought was the solution.

"Our goal was to have less animals, but better animals," Mr. Schnese said.

Less than four miles away, halfway between Wild Rose and Wautoma in Waushara County, Verleen and Tom Shear had been developing a herd of purebred Piedmontese for six years out of top Italian genetics.

The Schneses gradually shifted their entire herd to Piedmontese, and the two couples combined forces to help with farm work and promote the breed at shows as the Wild Rose Cattle Consortium.

Both couples said they chose Piedmontese after a lot of research into breeds that would add value to their part-time farming operations.

Piedmontese cattle carry a mutated myostatin gene that allows muscle groups to grow exceptionally large. Those muscles are made up of bundles of short fibers with less connective tissue than on most other beef breeds, meaning it is also a very tender meat.

Purebred Piedmontese bulls are guaranteed to pass a copy of the myostatin gene to their F1 progeny, meaning improve-

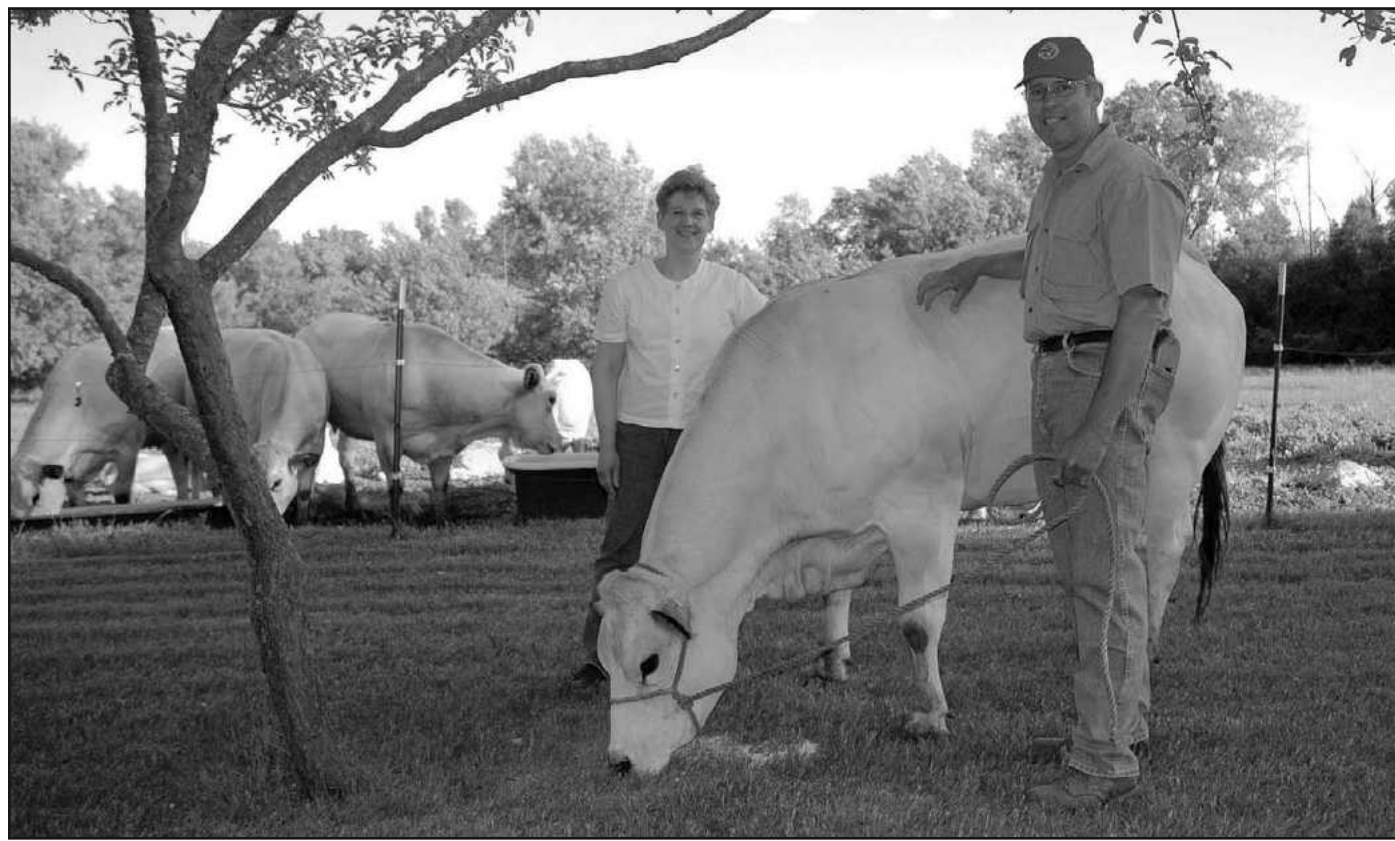


Photo by Sara Bredesen

Sally and Keith Schnese of Wild Rose trained their Piedmontese to the halter as calves so they can be easily handled as adults. Their 4-year-old cow, Hanne, and her 2006 calf were the grand champion cow/calf pair at World Beef Expo in Milwaukee.

ment in meat yield, tenderness and leanness are seen right away.

Testing at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb., found that adding one copy of the Piedmontese myostatin gene creates no added calving difficulty and increases meat yield 7 percent with 14 percent less overall fat than beef from animals without the gene.

The claim for tenderness also held up in MARC stud-

ies that found Piedmontese F1 crosses out of Angus and Hereford cows consistently produced the most tender meat.

"Right now, the biggest market for Piedmontese beef is the sale of bulls to producers that are raising lean beef for the lean-beef market, and that's big on both coasts," Mrs. Shear said.

She said the biggest lean-meat buyers are Laura's Lean and Montana Range brands, and both are looking for more product.

One thing the Shears and Schneses found early on was that the genetic pool for Piedmontese was quite small in the United States. They have made a point of importing semen from Italy, where records go back to the 1800s, and breeding is strictly controlled for continual improvement in traits such as calving ease, rate of gain, yield and leanness.

As they got further into artificial insemination and embryo transplant with their animals, they found they had a distinct advantage over breeders in other parts of the country because AI and ET technicians are accessible.

"It definitely puts us farther ahead in our program," Mr.

Schnese said. "(Other parts of the country) may have embryologists, but it's at their land grant colleges. We have embryologists practically as our neighbors."

The Schneses and Shears promote their animals in national shows, but Mr. Schnese said what a judge sees as a top animal on one particular day is not as important as being able to prove a strong genetic background through pedigrees and a database of more than 197,000 Piedmontese in the Italian herd book.

The two families operate their herds separately — the Shears keeping 65 to 70 and the Schneses 35 to 40 — but they confer on what genetics will improve each herd, and they share equipment, work and help in the show-ring when it is needed.

The Shears' herd has produced two World Beef Expo grand champions and a national champion bull at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky. The Schneses showed the grand champion cow/calf pair at the 2006 World Beef Expo and had cow/calf and bull grand champions last year at the same event.

Both couples said they don't

market beef but are concentrating on selling genetics to producers who want more margins out of their grass or feedlot inputs.

"I think there's a lot of people out there right now who are saying, 'What do I do? These costs are terrible, and how am I going to get more money for my animals?' I think that by having more muscle on them and having less waste when you take them to the stockyard is how you're going to do it," Mr. Schnese said.

Mr. Shear added that the cow/calf operator is getting squeezed because growers don't want to pay much for an animal that is going to take a lot of expensive feed to get it to the market.

"The alternative is probably straightforward," he said. "If you're a small operator, selling a lean-beef breed, grass-fed, you can put a very, very good product on the table."

Wild Rose Cattle Consortium will be at Farm Technology Days July 15-17 in Greenleaf with other Wisconsin beef breeders and will have representatives of Laura's Lean and Montana Range brand to talk to cow/calf operators about crossing with Piedmontese.

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Grants available for sheep, goat research

The American Sheep and Goat Center recently announced the availability of up to \$200,000 to eligible groups for research projects that will benefit the U.S. sheep and goat industries.

The competitive grants can cover projects that develop products, businesses, producer information or education, marketing and promotion, genetic retention or animal health.

Applications for projects that will be completed on or before June 30, 2010, must

be received by Aug. 1.

Individual applicants are not allowed but public, private or cooperative organizations, nonprofits, tribal or public agencies are.

Approximately 11 grants will be awarded. The average award in the past has been approximately \$18,000.

Applications, required forms and information can be found at www.ascgusa.org or by contacting Steven Lee, executive director, at (202) 350-9065 or stevelee@ascgusa.org.

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WPA offers outreach program

To assist individual pork producers and local county pork producer organizations to be more involved and positively visible in their communities, the Wisconsin Pork Association and the Pork Checkoff announced a community outreach program.

The program's purpose is to multiply the positive effects of pork producer involvement in the communities where hogs are raised. It will offer matching funds for expenses on selected community relations activities.

Programs eligible for cost-sharing dollars include:

- Sponsoring pork as the main dish for a community meal or charity event.
- Hosting a hog roast or other pork meal for a nearby housing development.
- Sponsoring a local sports team (your farm name and the pork logo would be displayed).
- Sponsoring signage at a local sporting event (your farm name and the pork logo would be displayed).
- Sponsoring a local festival.
- Visiting classrooms to educate youth about the nutritional value of pork and modern pork production (materials provided by the WPA).

To be eligible, pork producers or county pork producer organizations must:

- Fill out and submit a cost share request form to the WPA at least two weeks prior to the event.
- Submit design ideas to the WPA so that appropriate logos and messages may be included.
- Meet WPA guidelines.

The guidelines instruct a significant portion of the audience must be non-family and non-employee; sponsorship dollars must be used and visible in the local community; funds may not be used for political fund-raising events; and the WPA Promotion Committee will have final decision to approving funds. Limited funds are available, so projects will be approved on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information or to receive a request form, contact the Wisconsin Pork Association office at (800) 822-7675 or wppa@wppa.org.