



Cattle Price: Who you buy from is more important

We have gotten a few calls recently from people who are either looking for cattle or already own cattle and are running into issues with the animals they have purchased. The issues aren't always that terrible, they are just not what the people were expecting. People calling for breeding stock are surprised when we tell them the prices they can expect to pay for a registered animal. *"Why would we pay that when we can get something for half the price on Craig's List?"*

That is the mentality that is frustrating us, as breeders of registered Scottish Highland Cattle. There seems to have been an increase in the numbers of low cost animals for sale. I am not saying that a low cost, and maybe unregistered, animal is bad (we own a steer from such a listing – Norman is a sweetheart), but you need to be experienced or well educated in the breed to be able to make a purchase like this and be happy with the results.

If you are looking to purchase animals, there are some questions that need to be asked:

1. What is the temperament of the herd in general?
2. Are they high-headed animals (extra alert!)?
3. What happens if you enter the pen – are the animals still friendly? Do they watch you, or do they run away?
4. What is the temperament of the particular animals you are looking at purchasing? Can you put your hands on them?
5. What is their body condition like? Do they have the appropriate weight on them? Are they too fat or too skinny?
6. What is their conformation like? This is very important when looking at longevity of a breeding animal.
7. Do they appear healthy? Or do they have snotty noses or a poor (dull) hair coat?
8. Does the owner handle the animals in a way that you find agreeable, or are they rough with them?
9. Is the seller willing to help you after the sale with questions and/or handling?
10. Does the seller seem knowledgeable about the animals/breed?

You should always be leery of someone who says it will be no problem to tame an animal down. It probably won't be, but it will take a lot of time and patience, and you need a small enough pen to make this work. Some experience with doing this also helps. See our fact sheet on halter breaking at www.flatlandfarm.com.

Most people looking at Scottish Highland cattle want an animal that is easy to handle because they have a small farm and don't have the typical cattle-handling facilities. They need to be able to walk up and check on an animal, and easily move it into an isolation pen if needed. The handler and animal need to feel safe and secure while doing this. The easiest way is to halter train your animals (most easily done when they have been handled at a very young age). The second easiest way to handle your animals is to have the animals trust you so they move where you want in a calm manner. Needing a bunch of people to circle around an animal while yelling and waving arms or sticks around is not going to make this a good experience for anyone. You may get the job done this time, but it may not work so well that 2nd or 3rd time. They remember!

So – what is the best way to purchase Scottish Highland cattle and have a good experience? Visit farms – as many as you can. You get to talk with the breeder and see how they handle their animals. You will quickly find out who you want to purchase an animal from. Resist the temptation to purchase from the first farm you visit. That doesn't mean you can't go back, but make sure you look at others so you have something to compare to.

You've done some homework and are ready to buy. Now you get to choose. Do you go with an animal that is going to cost less up front, but take commitment of time to gentle, or pay a little more and know you are getting an animal you are going to be able to handle from day one? The choice is yours.

*Notes:

- Animals may act differently when loose in a pen with you than they may on a halter
- Cows tend to be comfortable with people they know – it will take a few days for them to get comfortable with you
- We are just sharing our experiences and do not guarantee any results