

Wagyu

What are they? Where did they come from?

The word Wagyu refers to all Japanese beef cattle ('Wa' means Japanese or Japanese-style and 'gyu' means cattle).

Most of the cattle were influenced by British and Continental breeds for a few generations nearly 100 years ago. Brown Swiss, Shorthorn, Devon, Simmental, Ayrshire, Korean, Holstein and Angus had been imported by 1887 and impacted today's Wagyu.



Crossbreeding was prominent for several years, but when the price of crossbreds collapsed in 1910 no further crossbreeding was conducted. The result was selection for specific traits determined by region and extensive linebreeding was used to achieve those traits.

The dominant black Wagyu strains are Tottori, Tajima, Shimane, and Okayama. Tajima cattle, bred in the Tajima region, were originally chosen and bred for their heavy forequarters because



their primary use was to pull carts. They tend to be smaller and less heavily muscled than the Tottori breed. Tottori cattle, because they were used as pack animals for the grain industry of the Tottori region, were selected for their size and strength of topline.

The other main "breed" of Wagyu, was developed on the island of Kyushu and are red in color. As with the blacks, there are two distinct strains-Kochi and Kumamoto: Kochi cattle were strongly influenced by Korean breeding while Kumamoto are believed to have considerable Simmental influence.

The original import of these cattle to the U.S. in 1976 consisted of two Tottori Black Wagyu and two Kumamoto Red Wagyu bulls. That was the only importation of Wagyu into the U.S. until 1993 when two male and three female Tajima cattle were imported and 1994 when 35 male and female cattle consisting of both red and black genetics reached the U.S.