

Big Problem; Tiny Solution



**Animal Science
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Big Problem; Tiny Solution

When you hear the words miniature, mini, micro, petite, or tiny, what do you think of? Maybe it's the world's smallest man, standing at a mere 26.4 inches tall. Perhaps it's Thumbelina, the world's smallest horse, weighing in at a hefty 57 pounds. Or is it that tiny steak, sitting on your plate, with a big bill I might add, that makes you think, where's the nearest McDonalds? In a society where super sizing is always the answer, and where the philosophy that "bigger is always better" shines through, downsizing just may be the solution. Because of the economic downturn, the skyrocketing prices of corn, the search for a healthier lifestyle, and an increase in environmental concerns, many producers are searching for that next "big solution." But this solution may just come in a tiny package, sparking a "big boom" in the "mini cow."

Miniature cows: compact cattle with stocky bodies, smaller frames, and relatively tiny appetites. The International Miniature Cattle Breeder's Society and Registry defines mini cows to be between 500 and 900 pounds, and 42 to 48 inches at the hip bone. Although these fairly new bovines aren't as popular as their larger cousins, interest among farmers and ranchers is growing at a steady rate of twenty percent per year! These modern cows may seem foreign and strange, although most of them are actually related to well known breeds such as the Angus, Hereford, and Brahman. Some mini cows are descendants of the ancient Zebu cattle, which are similar to the Brahman breed. A handful of these were brought to the United States from South India in the 1820's. Some special breeds of micro-cattle were created using genetic selection; the selection of

animals as breeding stock on the basis of known inherited characteristics. The miniature Hereford was developed in the 1960's and 70's, while the rest of the Hereford breed was being selected for growth and size. Lowlines, derived from the Angus breed, were created using genetic selection in 1929 in Australia. There is a great variety among these miniaturized breeds with twenty-six different breeds currently recognized, as well as several composite breeds being selected.

Albert Nobel, founder of the Nobel Peace Prize, once said, "Second to agriculture, humbug is the biggest industry of our age." Unfortunately, these diminutive breeds are getting a lot of doubt from some skeptical producers. But, these skeptics should take a second look. What will it take to change America's "bigger is better" mentality? What if I told you that ten mini cows can graze on the same five acres that previously only two standard sized cows could live on. Those ten mini cows could produce about 6,000 pounds of meat, while their larger cousins could only produce about 2,000 pounds of meat. That's three times the beef with only one-third of the feed! These numbers are possible because of the petite cows' feed efficiency. They mature up to twenty percent earlier and only require one-third to one-half of the nutrition to finish.

Do you have that extra 5 acre pasture out back, just waiting to be used? Then the mini cow just might be for you! Perhaps the best part of these miniaturized breeds is that they thrive on grass, so there is no feeding cost as long as the grass holds out. Plus, their smaller hooves won't tear up the pasture. With the soaring prices of corn, this is a huge solution to a problem many small and large operation farmers are facing. The petite cows'

meat can also be marketed as organic, natural, or grass-fed beef, with the possibility of fetching a higher price from the health conscious consumer. Miniature cattle also provide a more petite cut of meat, which can be attractive to today's buyer. At the same time, the proportion of the prime cuts is larger. In miniature cattle, the rib eye area is 25-50 percent larger--1 ¼ to 1 ½ square inches of rib eye per 100 pounds. Comparatively, standard sized bovines only produce about one square inch per 100 pounds. Many critics review miniature beef high on quality, flavor, and tenderness. The meat is generally fine-grained with good intramuscular marbling. Now, wouldn't you want to sink your teeth into this succulent cut of beef?

With the fear of global warming rising, many Americans and Government officials are blaming cattle ranchers. According to experts on the frontlines in the fight against global warming, the collective belching and defecation of cattle produce more harmful greenhouse gasses than all the pollution from cars, trucks, and airplanes combined! In the United States, cattle emit about 5.5 million metric tons of methane per year, accounting for about twenty percent of U.S. methane emissions. And yes, you guessed it, the mini cow comes to the rescue again, showing us that a tiny change may just solve a huge problem! It takes ten mini cows to produce the same amount of methane as one normal-sized cow. Now there's a solution that can allow both farmers and concerned Americans to sleep easy at night.

When you hear the words miniature, mini, micro, petite, or tiny, what do you think of? Chances are, your opinion just might be a little different. Americans still may

enjoy their super sized burgers and meal deals, but the latest rage in the cattle industry is the mini cow. These tiny prodigies could help beef producers turn around our dire economy, with a plus for the environment. So the next time you're driving through the country, you may be seeing a mini cow amidst those golden stalks of corn and gigantic piles of wheat. The mini cow is our country's tiny solution to a big problem, and that's no load of bull!

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