



Scotch cattle provide meat alternatives

It might very well be Scotland.

Fog swirling around the steep rugged hillside ... Distant cowbells muffled by spring rain ... Then a string of shaggy cattle drift out of the densely wooded gully where they have spent the day. Brown cows with long hair, long horns and sheepdog bangs slant slowly up near vertical slopes which appear more suited to billy goats or mountain sheep than cattle. Lowing back and forth to their mothers, chunky calves pause, then bound along the trail to catch up.

"Cocobus... Cocobus," Dr. Eva Blum calls to encourage her cattle—not in Scotland after all, but on the steep slopes of Langley Hill just west of Skyline—to come and pose for a photographer. Recognizing that she does not have any food for them, the cows and their calves do not approach but wander slowly up the misty hill to their evening grazing.

Dr. Blum's cows are an ancient and special breed—Scotch Highland—and she is raising them for special and modern reasons.

Hardy, agile, healthy and gentle, Scotch Highland cattle have tender and

combine the hardiness of wild Barbados sheep with the advantages of domestic strains.

Both Blums, who moved up to the hill from Woodside several years ago, share a common interest in agriculture as well as similar careers at Stanford where they both work as behavioral scientists. Dr. Richard Blum, whose family began ranching in Napa County in 1848, grew up in agriculture and shares his wife's views. He is working social psychology and criminology projects at Stanford Law School.

He also designed their home. Modeled after an old California barn, the spacious house features a cathedral-like living room with a large rock fireplace at one end and a spectacular view of the hills and ocean at the other. The front door, inset with bronze plaques of a Tibetan calendar wrought in intricate relief, sets the tone for the fine furniture, oriental art works and antique ikons which decorate the interior.

Dr. Eva Blum, who works part time at Stanford in programs on crime, drugs, and community studies, has recently been elected by her fellow ranchers as the first woman member of the Agricultural

Stabilization and Conservation Committee for San Mateo County. The committee which is established under the United States Department of Agriculture, helps administer federal programs aimed at improving farming methods and conserving soil and wildlife.

The committees promote soil conservation which benefits not only ranchers but wildlife as well, Dr. Blum explained. "Every project has a provision to help provide water and cover for wildlife. By cost-sharing the program gets people interested in conservation and teaches them how to do it," she said. This year the committee is emphasizing drought relief programs aimed at improving and dispersing the dwindling water supplies on the coastside.

But for the Blums these measures may not be enough. Streams which should normally be rushing in May are dry, springs and wells are drying up, and the cattle drink about ten gallons per animal per day. For a herd of 30, this adds up to 300 gallons per day, which may be hard to find.

Dr. Blum has still other areas of interest. With some geologists from Stanford and the U.S. Geological Survey, the Blums have a 600 tree farm near Saratoga Gap which they manage as a nature preserve for timber and wildlife. For awhile Dr. Eva Blum also worked with the Institute of Animal Behavior at the San Francisco Zoo on reproduction of endangered species.

But Dr. Blum's real love is her cattle. People who work with Scotch Highland cattle really love them, she said. "It's a very intense relationship." They never get a disease; they never have calving problems; they are very good mothers with lots of very rich milk. Dr. Blum noted that feed lots don't like them because of their horns; but those same horns are very effective at keeping coyotes and other predators away. Even the hides are attractive as rugs and bespreads, Dr. Blum noted.

One of the oldest and purest of beef breeds, records of Scotch Highland cattle go back to the twelfth century, Dr. Blum said. They still have great snob appeal in England where the Queen maintains a fold at Balmoral and the shaggy brown cows may be seen grazing around many of the great homes and castles.

Dr. Blum noted the gentleness of the Scotch Highland cattle goes back to the early days of Scotland when the cattle often occupied the ground floor of the houses and shared food with the family. The cows would be fed with the family's gruel, and the bulls would contribute blood for the gruel. Because they shared such close quarters, the cattle needed to be bred for gentleness. Sometimes they were taken on Sunday picnics, Dr. Blum said, and "Any ornery bull would be culled."

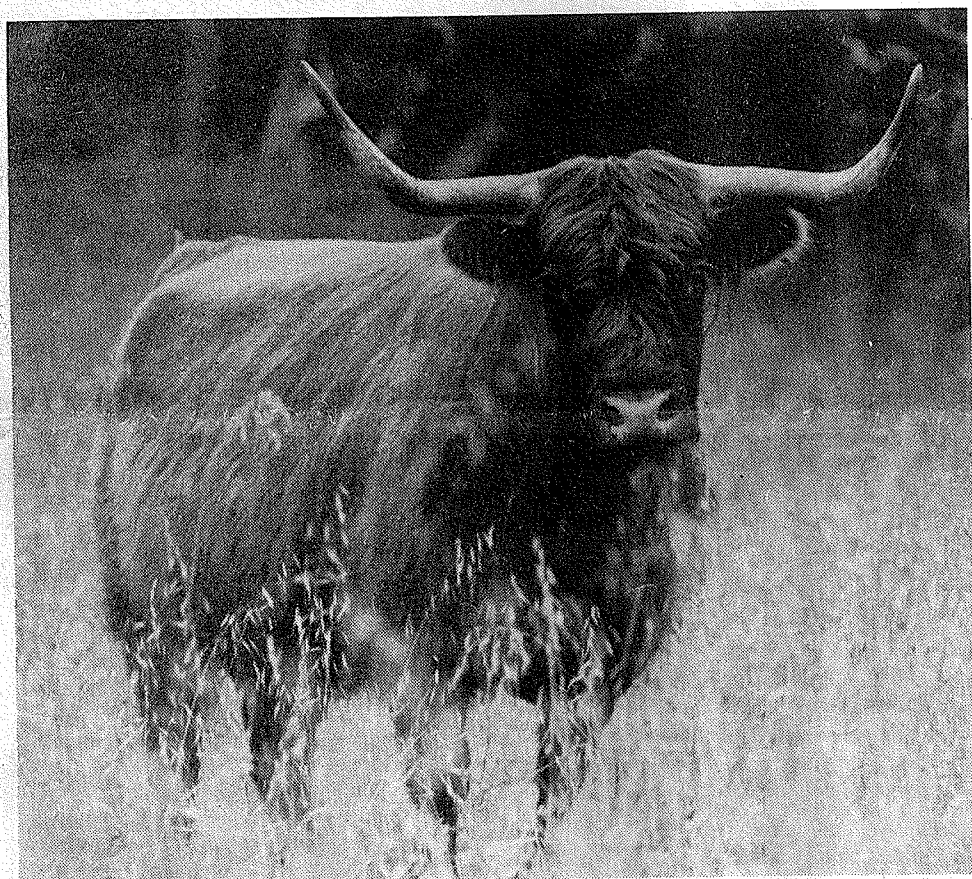


DR. EVA BLUM, in work clothes, pauses on her evening walk to check the hills and valleys around Langley Hill for her herd of Scotch Highland cattle.

Another conservation effort which Dr. Blum advocates is the American family farm—itself now an endangered species. The reservoir for American traditions of hard work, independence, and personal integrity, family farms are being abandoned at a rate of 2,000 per month. The families move into the cities and increase their load of urban unemployment and, for unguided offspring, delinquency, Dr. Blum said. "However much American agribusiness has contributed to low food costs, we cannot pay the price of the ruin of the family farm," Dr. Blum went on. "These costs arising from farm migration are a hidden portion of the agribusiness food bill."

In San Mateo County, also, the livestock industry is dying because the land is too expensive to buy for cattle raising, Dr. Blum said. "This type of land is excellent for raising cattle if it weren't so expensive. The trouble is that it's so attractive that city dwellers like myself like to live here," she said.

by Marion Softky



ARIADNE will look at a camera but won't come too close. She is one of Dr. Eva Blum's herd of Scotch Highland cattle—an ancient and hardy strain being raised on the steep hills of the Coastside far from their native Scotland. All Dr. Blum's cattle are named from ancient Greek myths and legends.

fine-textured meat even though it is not marbled with fat—and cholesterol—as are the commoner strains of cattle which are currently popular in this country.

Dr. Blum points out these cattle mature more slowly and therefore are more drought resistant than most meat cattle. They can eat poison oak, leaves and twigs when the native grass becomes scarce. And they are adept at crossing the high paths and cliffs that are present on the Coastside as well as in Scotland.

"They are tender. And without cholesterol and fat and waste, they are healthier to eat," Dr. Blum said.

But Scotch Highland cattle are more than just an exotic, picturesque breed. They are also a primitive strain which could provide a seed bank of genetic material that is hardy and adaptable. Dr. Blum views such herds as a conservation measure in themselves. They can form a reserve stock for world food supplies in case new diseases or environmental threats wipe out the more delicate and exotic strains now in fashion.

Dr. Blum and her husband, Richard, live on the 40-plus acre Volcano Ranch—named because of its location on the slopes of Langley Hill which, together with the neighboring Mindego Hill, is a long extinct volcano. Here their herd of some 30 Scotch Highland cattle graze on 250 acres of their land and land leased from neighbors. The Blums are also engaged in research on developing new strains of sheep which



JOCASTA AND FRIENDS, Scotch Highland cattle, leave the cover where they have spent the day and wind their way, lowing, along the slopes of Langley Hill for some evening grazing on the spring grass. The hardy agile Scotch cattle are

being raised by Dr. Eva Blum to provide a sturdy, low-cholesterol alternative to the more delicate breeds which dominate the meat markets.