



The native home of the Dexter is in the southern part of Ireland where they were bred by small land holders and roamed about the shelter-less mountainous districts in an almost wild state of nature. The first recorded knowledge of Dexters in America is when more than two hundred Dexters were imported to the US between 1905 and 1915. They can now be found in nearly every climate and region in the United States. In recent years there has been a worldwide surge of interest in Dexter cattle. Their hardy constitution, versatile adaptability, thrifty nature, high fertility, and low rate of calving difficulties continue to make them appealing to ranching operations of any size.

Dexters are a small, tri-purpose cattle breed, being raised for milk, meat and draft. They are not miniature cattle; they were initially bred as a naturally small bovine and they have maintained their small, hardy constitution to the present. Pound for pound, Dexters are efficient food producers, economically turning forage into rich milk and quality meat. Daily milking yields are commonly 1-3 gallons, with a butterfat content of 4-5%. Yields of cream up to one quart per gallon are possible. Most Dexter steers are considered mature and ready for processing by about 24 months of age. Beef production for a two-year-old steer can typically put 200-300 pounds of exceptionally flavored, well-marbled beef into the freezer. Dexter oxen, with their natural trainability and docile temperament, can be long-lived, hardy work animals for farm chores or for exhibition purposes. Due to their small size, they have a minimally negative impact on the land being worked.

There is some variety of color, stature, and horned status within the Dexter breed. Dexters come in three solid colors: black, red or dun. They are either horned or polled, with some people preferring to dehorn them. Some variation in the stature occurs between carriers of chondrodysplasia and non-carriers. Typical range in height for cows of either type is 34-46 inches, with a majority in the range of 36-42 inches. Bulls of either type are normally in the range of 36-50 inches tall, with a majority in the range of 38-44 inches.

As the breed grows in popularity, it is becoming easier to find Dexters in the show ring. The National Show fielded approximately 150 animals in 2016. State and Regional shows with specific Dexter classes are often numbering in the 70-80 animal size. Oxen are being featured at various gatherings as well. Each of these types of events showcases the quality and beauty of these special bovines, offering interested people the opportunity to learn more about the breed from experienced breeders.

Dexters are hardy, sturdy cattle that are sure-footed on almost any terrain. They thrive on quality pasture or hay, but are also efficient foragers and aggressive browsers, helping to clear brushy, weedy areas when given access to them. Because of their small size and thriftiness, they require less pasture space than large breed cattle and are easier on the land and fences. With so many benefits, Dexters make good sense for the small family farm as well as large ranching operations. No other bovine can satisfy such a diverse market.

For more information on specific Dexter traits, please see the ADCA Breed Guidelines below:  
<http://www.dextercattle.org/pdf/new/Breed%20Guidelines%20061616-3.pdf>