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Keeping Charolais Crossbred Heifers as Replacements

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In crossbreeding plans involving Charolais bulls the term "terminal cross" is often used. "Terminal cross" means that all calves, both steers and heifers, will be sold at weaning with no heifers kept for replacements.

The most popular continental breed used in the U.S. is the Charolais, a French breed. Charolais gained popularity in the 1950's and 1960's, but fell out of vogue in the 1970's for a number of reasons. Charolais has regained much of its popularity in the last fifteen years, primarily from the use of Charolais bulls in commercial crossbreeding programs. In Florida, Charolais bulls have been used in many cow herds containing Brahman and English crossbred brood cows.

In 1963, Mr. Mac Peacock initiated a crossbreeding study at the Range Cattle REC at Ona that involved Charolais, Brahman and Angus breeds. The study was designed to evaluate the three purebreds and all possible two-way crosses between the three breeds.

One outcome of the study was that Brahman genetics is very important for adaptability whether in combination with Angus or Charolais breeds. It was also observed that Brahman x Charolais crossbred cows performed equally well as Brahman x Angus crossbred cows. These comparisons were for both cow reproduction performance and calf weaning weight.

These research data indicate that heifer calves resulting from crossbreeding Charolais x Brahman will make good replacements into a commercial breeding herd. Another acceptable breeding plan could involve breeding Brangus, or Braford type cows to Charolais bulls. Heifers from these crosses could be bred to Angus and Hereford bulls, or bulls from other *Bos taurus* breeds. This would likely be a "terminal cross" because the

level of Brahman genetics may be too low for cows used in south Florida. However, these heifers should make good brood cows in the more temperate climate of north Florida and other areas in the Southeast.

Recently the author visited the Lightsey Ranch near Lake Wales, Florida. This ranch has a large herd of crossbred brood cows developed by breeding Braford cows to Charolais bulls. This herd is bred back to Angus bulls and has an excellent weaning rate of heavy feeder calves that attract top dollar when marketed. Again, this would be a "terminal cross" for south Florida because of the low Brahman influence.

In summary, a production plan involving breeding Brahman or Brahman derivative cows to Charolais bulls will produce replacement heifers very acceptable for use in commercial breeding herds in south Florida. If these heifers and cows are then bred to Angus, Hereford, or back to Charolais bulls, good heavy calves would be produced, but resulting females should be marketed for feeding and slaughter. They could possibly be marketed as breeding stock in north Florida and other temperate regions in the Southeast.