

Cattle Domestication: from Aurochs to Cow

The **aurochs** (*Bos primigenius*) an extinct cattle species, considered to be the wild ancestor of modern domestic cattle. They went extinct around 1627 AD. All cattle are descended from as few as 80 animals that were domesticated from the aurochs (wild ox) in the Near East.

Cattle all fall under the same scientific classification of *Bos Taurus* with cows, bulls, and oxen all sharing a variety of common features.

The first domestic cattle were a form with long horns, whose characteristics are still common in several British, French, Mediterranean and African breeds. About 3000 years BC the first cattle with short horns appeared in Mesopotamia. This phenotype was more suitable for those habitats and replaced by a second wave of migrations most long-horns forms in Asia and neighboring continents, reaching Britain around 1000-2000 years BC. These short-horn cattle were the most common form in Europe from about 1000 years BC.

Since the time of Moses aurochs were harnessed as draft animals to pull plows, carts, wagons, and other types of work. It wasn't until the late 1800's that oxen started to see a decline in usage for plowing. The invention of the horse collar and traction harness are credited with the demise of the draft oxen.

There are many different thoughts regarding which breed of bovine was most widely used as a draft animal. The common conversion regardless of species or breed is to neuter a bull calf after it is mature. Even one of America's last producers of oxen says that an ox is nothing more than a steer that "goes to work"