The New White Angus

By A.T. Cole

When Lucinda and I purchased the Pitchfork Ranch in southwest New Mexico more than a decade ago, our primary interest was in restoring the historic ciénaga and improving the rangeland for grass fed and grass finished beef and wildlife. Over the last decade, we have converted our small herd of cattle from a mixed breed dominated by Black Angus to the Charolaise breed. Borrowing from the new Netflix show "Orange is the New Black," we propose that white Charolaise should be the new Black Angus. Here is a photograph of our bull and below is our thinking as to why we have "gone white."



Despite remaining doubts about the warming of the planet, the temperature in New Mexico is now 3.4 degrees warmer than it was in 1984 and 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 were, in predictable succession, the hottest years on record, Arctic sea ice is decreasing, glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, snow is decreasing and storms are worsening. On this ranch, the monsoon rains have become the monsoon trace.

Ranchers know that heat stress during summer negatively affects animal performance. Cattle instinctively will use natural shade to escape the radiant heat from the sun. Associate Professor M. Shane Gadberry of the University of Arkansas writes, "Breed type and coat color can influence heat tolerance." Research at the United States Department of Agriculture Meat Animal Research Center studied cattle of different coat colors and found that solar absorption was greater in cattle with darker hair coats and that black cattle spend more time in the shade than white cattle.

C.R. Dahlen, Beef Cattle Specialist and C.L. Stoltenow, veterinarian, write, "Animals with dark hides are at a higher risk of suffering heat stress and dying." A 1999 Mississippi State University of Veterinary Medicine study found that black cows may absorb more than twice the solar radiation than white cows; another study found that cows with

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white hair coat absorb about 66% of shortwave radiation compared to 89% absorption for predominately black-hair coat colors and still others suggest that white cows are 15 degrees cooler that black cattle.

For those committed to Angus, United States scientists Dr. James West and Dr. Warren Gill are expected to bring white Angus very close to a commercial reality and are expected to have white Angus calves with a "far greater heat tolerance capacity"—on the ground by early 2017. A startup in the U.S. called AgGenetics is using modern biotechnology techniques developed for human medicine to remedy the heat absorption shortcomings of the traditional Black Angus. This company reports that its new technology is protected by more than two dozen patent applications that will allow the replacement of the black coat normally found in Angus cattle with white-hair coat colors and add approximately 15 degree of heat tolerance in Angus.

Confirmation of this difference in heat absorption can be easily verified by simply standing outside for 15 minutes on a hot day wearing a black T-shirt, then switching to a white T-shirt for another quarter hour.

Whether you go out and buy all white cattle, gradually phase out your black ones are wait for the arrival of White Angus, life can be made

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easier on cattle and a greater return realized by making the switch. Our neighbor who has raised cattle for nearly 65-years — he was raised in a ranching family and was given his first cow when he was seven points out: "When you take the hide off, the meat all tastes the same."