



## INNOVATORS

# American Akaushi Association | Ready for a new breed



Bubba Bain, executive director of the American Akaushi Association. PHOTO BY MAIKE SABOLICH

BY BRIAN BRUS  
THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma market is finally ready to introduce a new cattle breed into its herd and onto restaurant plates, said Bubba Bain, executive director of the American Akaushi Association.

“It’s taken a while. But we’ve all been down that road before,” Bain said. “All those breed names you know about already, they had to go through the same educational process before they fit in. So it’s not really any different, what we’re seeing now. It just doesn’t happen very often.

“What’s nice about this is that the Japanese government has already spent billions of dollars on identifying this breed; a lot of scientific research has been done on it,” he said. “All we’re doing is taking advantage of those dollars to improve our own market.”

Most consumers are familiar with Kobe beef, at least when they order an expensive steak at a restaurant. Kobe beef traditionally refers to cuts of beef prepared from regionally differentiated breeds of Wagyu cattle in Japan raised on local feed. Akaushi is one of the four recognized breeds within the Wagyu group. Wagyu is said to be more marbled than other types of

beef, with larger amounts of intramuscular, monounsaturated fat that gives the meat tenderness and flavor.

Domestically raised Kobe-style beef is an attempt to capture those attributes most attractive to the end consumer, usually by cross-breeding imported Wagyu. Red Angus also has a high degree of marbling, which makes it a good match and entry point for local ranchers, Bain said.

Until the U.S. Akaushi herd grows large enough to elbow its way into the consumer market on its own, HeartBrand Beef is providing an incentive for breeders to risk investing in the new breed. HeartBrand owns the largest purebred herd of Akaushi outside of Japan in Harwood, Texas. HeartBrand’s initial herd of 11 animals imported from the Mount Aso region was carefully guarded for about 15 years until reaching about 5,000 head, Bain said. With the core gene pool secured, HeartBrand can now allow some cross-breeding by other producers with a promise to buy their beef at a premium.

“Last year was the first year we marketed any of the animals out of the core herd,” Bain said. “So basically we’ve been building our numbers to have something to introduce into the core market. Now our focus

is on getting our male genetics into the commercial industry to produce half-breed carcasses.”

Bain does not own any of the cattle himself; he works on building the association’s registry by introducing the breed to more producers, or “putting more boots on the ground,” as he described it. Those boots are in 12 states including Idaho, Montana, Oregon, New Mexico and North Dakota. Bain’s latest recruitment snagged a producer out of Shidler in far north Oklahoma and a centrally located cattle broker. Efforts to reach the men for comment were unsuccessful.

“The main difference in the way that we’re handling this is that we have an actual product to sell rather than just a trait,” Bain said. “We pay a high return per calf. Right now we’re paying about \$100 over market for five-weight (500-pound) calves. So whatever their calves are bringing that week, we’ll add money to it.”

And with the state of the country’s cattle herd now, which is shrinking as ranchers sell off their females and calves instead of holding them back for later production, it might be a particularly tempting time to consider reinvesting in Akaushi, Bain said.