

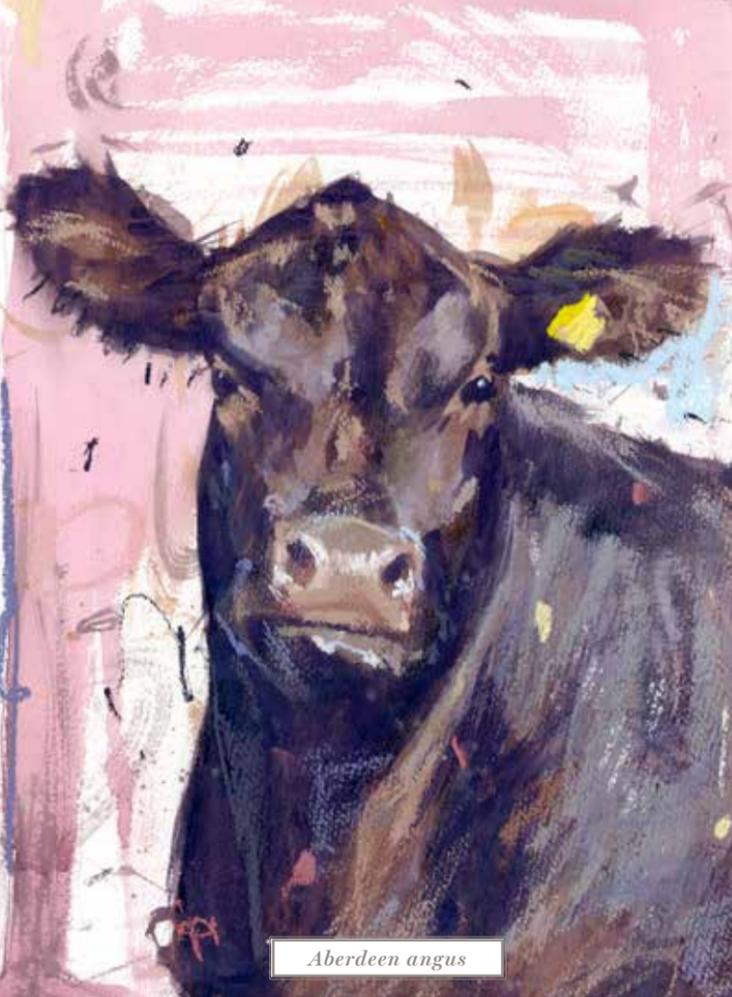
# Go native

Anna-Marie Julyan discovers what makes  
British cattle a cut above the rest

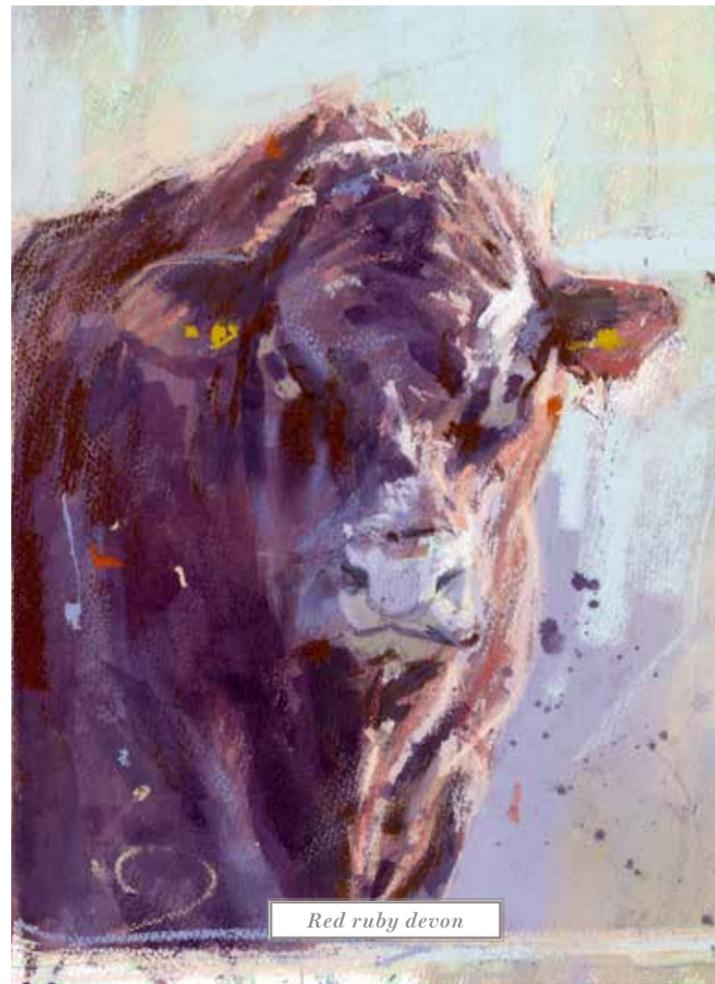
illustrations james bartholomew



Highland cattle



Aberdeen angus



Red ruby devon



Hereford



Welsh blacks



South devon

Slow-maturing and hardy, Britain's native cattle breeds have both fashioned and been shaped by the landscape over centuries. Whether grazing marshland on the Norfolk Broads, sparse scrub on Scottish mountains or the lush green of Devon hills, breeds such as the highland, south devon and aberdeen angus have adapted to make the most of their natural environment. Speak to any native beef farmer and they will tell how their cattle thrive on a diet based predominantly on grass and forage (such as hay or silage) without the need for lots of costly imported feed. "Our red rubies are brilliant at going out on land that is difficult to farm and making the best use of it," says Rob May, who farms in Devon. "There's lots of ground in Britain where you could never grow vegetables or cereal crops because it's too steep, wet or dry and they convert that poor grass into prime beef."

Trends, of course, come and go. In the 1970s native breeds lost out to some of their larger continental counterparts, but since the early 1990s, Waitrose has championed their cause so that now two thirds of all its beef comes from native breed sires. Herds (or 'folds', as groups of highland cattle are known) are dotted throughout the country, as well as flourishing around the world.

"Herefords are very adaptable and forgiving," says farmer Richard Mann, whose family has kept the white-faced breed of placid brown cattle in Warwickshire since the 1950s. "We've got a wet farm with heavy clay soil but they forgive the weather, they forgive you if you don't get it right and they never hold a grudge. We winter them in or out, depending on the ground conditions, because they grow their own roof in the form of a good strong coat."

The coat of the south devon breed, on the other hand, is a distinctive light red colour, and according to Gary Harding, who farms in Devon surrounded by the moors, they're hardy, quiet and easy to handle. "I do most things on my own, so that's important," he says.

By and large, native breeds may be easygoing but that's not to say they're pushovers. Highlands require minimal interference and will happily over-winter on high ground without shelter, burrowing through a foot of snow to find food, but they abide by a strict pecking order. "They're lovely to work with but can be mean to each other," says Robert Phillip, who farms on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales.

Red rubies meanwhile mostly disdain anything too energetic, though they can get fidgety. "Our red ruby cattle are pretty docile, and only get too excited when they think some extra titbit of food might be available," adds Rob. "Otherwise they plod along at their own pace."

There's a harmony between cattle and landscape that extends beyond the pleasure of seeing a field full of

contented grazing cows. Gary Gray farms a large herd of aberdeen angus on the Norfolk Broads, a wetland area that's home to a wide array of wildlife including pink footed geese and lapwings. The marshes don't provide the best-quality grazing ground, admits Gary, but his resourceful aberdeen angus thrive on it, simultaneously performing an important environmental service. "If the marshes weren't grazed they would all go back to scrub," he explains.

Breeds such as the beautiful welsh black have inhabited the Welsh hills since pre-Roman times. They are renowned for their well-marbled, juicy meat, explains John Davies, who farms in hills north of the Brecon Beacons. "I think it's no accident they do so well in this area, because it's in their genes," he says. "We grow barley to provide a ration for them in the winter and make good-quality silage - it's about producing as much as we can to be as self-sufficient as possible."

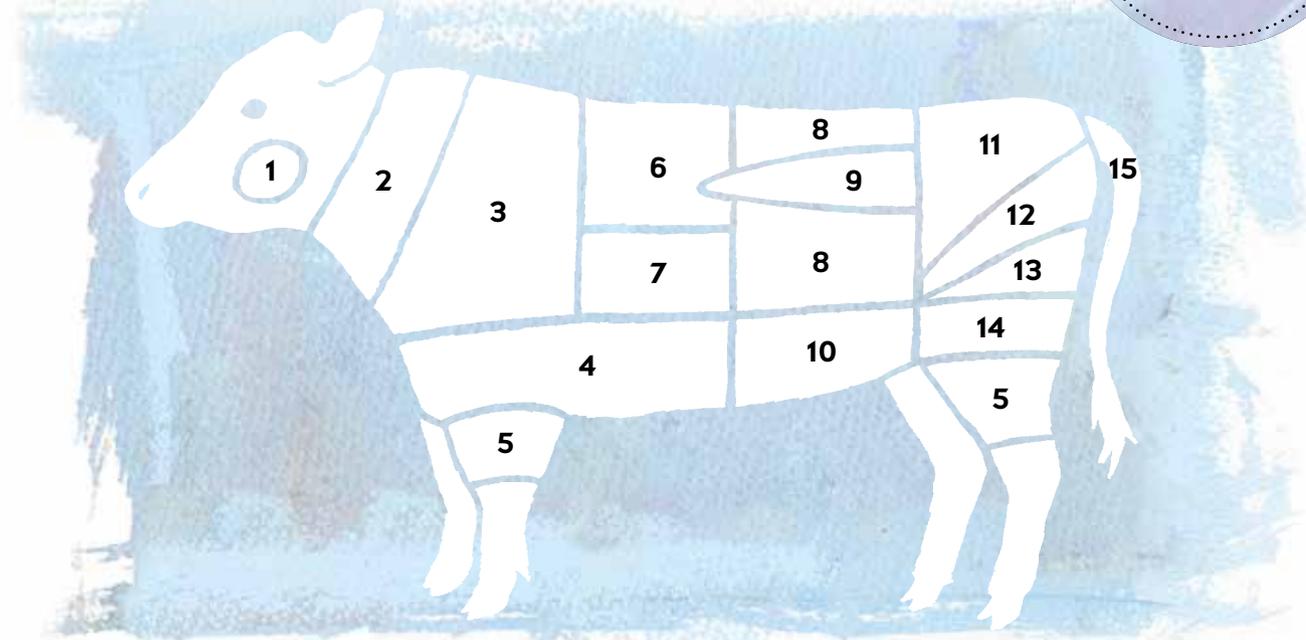
Farmers, by the very nature of their work, have to take a long-term view, and it's clear this puts native breeds central to their future. "There are always challenges; it wouldn't be fun without them," says Richard. "But I'm lucky to have done my hobby all my life." »

*There's a harmony between cattle and landscape that extends beyond the pleasure of seeing a field of grazing cows'*

# MAKING THE CUT

*Know your clod from your flank*

Find beef recipes such as skirt steak with grilled peppers and chimichurri or fully loaded beef burgers on the *Waitrose Food app\** or *waitrose.com*



## 1 OX CHEEK

Slow cooking this flavour-packed, lean muscle will tenderise it beautifully (try the ox cheek and aubergine massaman curry on page 99).

## 2 NECK & CLOD

The neck comprises intricate muscles to support the head. With a reasonable amount of fat and an intensely beefy flavour, it's a popular stewing and mince cut: try **Waitrose Beef Mince** (£9.99/kg).

## 3 CHUCK & BLADE

Both are from the shoulder area: chuck is normally sold in chunks - perfect for casseroles - while blade can be cut into well-marbled steaks, such as flat iron.

## 4 BRISKET

This economical cut needs long, gentle cooking, in a covered pot, to render it meltingly tender (see the balsamic pot-roast beef recipe on the *WF app\**). Try **Waitrose Brisket\*\*** (£11.49/kg).

## 5 SHIN & LEG

Made up of several hard-working tendons surrounding the leg bones, it can be cut into chunks for stewing, or whole, bone-in shanks, often from veal, for *osso bucco*.

## 6 FORERIB

The bovine equivalent of a rack of lamb, running from the sixth to tenth rib bones with uneven marbling, tender meat and generous fat. Roast on the bone or cut into steaks. Try **Aberdeen Angus Forerib** (£17.49/kg) and **Waitrose Highland Forerib of Beef\*\*** (£18.99/kg).

## 7 THIN RIB (or short rib)

Dense with connective tissue, thin rib is either cooked slowly in small chunks, or used in lean mince. The wide, thin short ribs pack in flavour and are best cooked on the bone.

## 8 SIRLOIN

A large joint cut into marbled, tender steaks, or left on the rib bones (called a wing rib). It can be sliced into larger

bone-in steaks. Try **30 Day Dry Aged Hereford Beef Sirloin Steak from Waitrose** (£31.99/kg).

## 9 FILLET (or tenderloin)

Fillet is the cow's most tender and least exercised muscle. It has a buttery smooth texture when cooked, though is less flavourful than nearby cuts, due to the lack of fat and marbling.

## 10 THIN FLANK

Effectively the belly of the cow, it can be cut into numerous long steaks that are both robust and full of flavour. All these cuts, including bavette and skirt, need either fast or very slow cooking. Try native breed **Waitrose Beef Skirt\*\*** (£10.79/kg).

## 11 RUMP

An affordable prime cut, rump has lean, tender flesh and little marbling, so should be served on the rare side. It has a thick layer of fat, which keeps it juicy when roasted as a whole piece.

## 12 TOPSIDE

From the upper backside, it's similar to rump in flavour, but without as much external fat. Can be cut into steaks but works wonders braised or slow-roasted for cold cuts.

## 13 SILVERSIDE

Taken from the back of the thigh, silverside is a semi-lean cut traditionally used for making salt beef as well as its 'corned' cousin. Like the other neighbouring joints, it appreciates a long, slow braise.

## 14 THICK FLANK (or top rump)

Cut from above the leg, the thick flank warrants either long, slow braising, or a quick flash-fry; it is often sold as 'frying steak' or 'stir-fry strips'.

## 15 OXTAIL

Full of flavour, these round cross-sections of the tail, seared on both sides before slow-cooking, make for some of the richest beef dishes thanks to the meaty flavour of the marrow.

WORDS MYLES WILLIAMSON \*AVAILABLE ON DEVICES RUNNING IOS7 OR LATER, OR ANDROID 4.0.3 OR LATER \*\*LIMITED AVAILABILITY †A PART FROM THE WAITROSE HIGHLAND FORERIB OF BEEF, PRICES LISTED ARE FOR CUTS FROM THE MEAT SERVICE COUNTER

Native beef breed cuts are available in stores both nationally (for aberdeen angus and hereford) and regionally. For red ruby and south devon, look for west country beef in the South West; highland is available only at Christmas through [waitrose.com/entertaining](http://waitrose.com/entertaining), while welsh black beef can be found in Welsh stores.†