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My Wagyu Experience in Japan and the U.S.

Dr. Jimmy L. Horner, Ph.D., P.A.S., Diplomate ACAN

I consider myself a very blessed man and I have had the very good fortune of working with some excellent Japanese producers since April 1994. They have taught me much and helped me come to very much appreciate the outstanding Wagyu cattle breed. Though I'm reluctant to single out a few specific individuals that provided me with opportunities early on in Japan and continue to be close friends and associates to this day, I'd be remiss if I did not mention the contributions of T. Sawamoto, owner of Hokkai Soko/Protocol Japan, Hokkaido; Y. Nakamura, owner of Kirishima Wagyu Farm/ABS Japan, Miyazaki; Kim Okuyama, my right hand/translator/sake connoisseur, Fresno and Dr. Nobu Murakami, owner of Murakami Farm, Kobe. These individuals have played vital roles in my getting the initial opportunity to serve the Japanese Wagyu and dairy industries over these past 21 years as a consulting nutritionist, and in my getting to forge lifelong friendships with many wonderful individuals. For this, I will be forever grateful.

In October 2012, I had the good fortune of meeting Michael Beattie (AWA Exec. Dir.), Bob Estrin (owner Lone Mountain Wagyu) and Grant Robinson (manager Cane Ridge Cattle) in of all places, the All Japan Wagyu Show in Nagasaki, Japan. Almost immediately we all realized each of us possessed a mutual passion for the Wagyu breed and I have been very blessed to work with these gentlemen and fellow Wagyu enthusiasts ever since returning from that trip. I have also had the good fortune of serving and getting to know many more U.S. Wagyu producers over these past few years.

My personal experience is that the biggest difference between Wagyu in the U.S. and Japan is not necessarily in the area of genetics, but in level and approach of management. Much of the mindset in the U.S. must change in order to realize comparable results with Wagyu beef in Japan. If the cattle are fed and cared for properly, I know for a fact that we can produce top quality Wagyu beef comparable to that in Japan. In order to achieve this, we must do a better job of minimizing stress incurred by our cattle throughout their lifetime as environmental stress appears to be the single most limiting factor on both growth and marbling in the Wagyu breed. My firm sponsored a study at A to Z Feeders in Atlantic, Iowa and one highly valuable bit of information we gleaned from the study was that several weeks of harsh winter conditions at the end of the feeding period reduced marbling scores in WagyuXAngus F1's from 10-15% during the last two weeks prior to harvest. This affirmed my steadfast contention of the importance of animal comfort and its high correlation with final marbling scores.

I have the good fortune of getting to continue to serve the Japanese Wagyu market after 21 years and 46 trips, and over the past few years I also now have the privilege to work with some of the top Wagyu breeders in the U.S. as well. I am completely humbled by the opportunity to become acquainted with so many wonderful individuals and to be a very small part of the amazing Wagyu breed!

Author

Dr. Jimmy Horner holds a Ph.D. in Ruminant Nutrition from Texas A&M University and a M.S. in Animal Science from Oklahoma State University and has been consulting and teaching animal nutrition for more than 30 years. Dr. Horner is the President/CEO of Protocol Naturals/Protocol Technologies/Horner Industries, Bridgeport, Texas.