

## **TLBAA's Miniature Texas Longhorn Registry**

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Approximately six years ago a breeder of Miniature Texas Longhorns wanted to enter his cattle in TLBAA shows so that they could build public awareness about Miniature Texas Longhorns, in an effort to increase demand for these small-framed Texas Longhorns. The TLBAA informed this breeder that even though his cattle were registered as Texas Longhorns with the TLBAA, they deviated in size so substantially from the TLBAA's main breed standard that they would not do well in their shows and discouraged this breeder from entering his cattle in TLBAA sanctioned events. The TLBAA suggested that this breeder present a proposal to the TLBAA Board of Directors (BOD) to create a new Miniature registry so that his cattle could be judged using a different breed standard that was specific to miniatures. Eventually, in 2009, this breeder's proposal was accepted by the TLBAA BOD and the rules for this new registry were drafted by a committee formed by the TLBAA BOD. This committee worked with a number of miniature breeders to come up with a set of rules that seemed reasonable to both the miniature breeders as well as the BOD. On May 26, 2010 the rules of the new TLBAA Miniature Texas Longhorn registry were approved by the BOD and the registry was born.

Rather than looking at successful examples within the cattle industry of how other cattle registries handled the problem of judging both miniatures and standard-sized cattle housed in a single registry, the TLBAA chose to blaze their own trail. The Hereford registry contains both standard-size and miniatures within a single registry. When animals are entered into Hereford competitions, the only factor that dictates whether the animal competes as a miniature or standard is hip height. Since both the miniature and standard-sized Herefords are the same breed, they are judged against the same standards but are broken out into appropriate size classes. Since the registry is simply a database of heredity, there was no good justification to split the registry based solely on the height of the animals.

The public justification for creating this new TLBAA Miniature registry was to establish new miniature standards so that the miniature Texas Longhorns could be entered in TLBAA sanctioned events and judged more fairly than if they were to compete in standard-sized classes. Rather than following the Hereford example, which has proven to be one of the most successful examples within the cattle industry, the TLBAA wanted to split their registry. The reason for this decision is that there were other motivating factors behind the TLBAA's decision to split their registry and none of these factors were disclosed to the miniature breeders prior to the creation of the new registry.

There were numerous examples of TLBAA registered "Miniature Texas Longhorns" on the Internet that looked like they were cross-bred and did not resemble pure Texas Longhorns. The TLBAA wanted to remove these suspicious animals from the standard registry. Rather than forcefully removing them from the registry and risking lawsuits, they convinced the miniature breeders to endorse splitting the TLBAA registry, which would remove these suspect animals from the standard registry and would quarantine them to this new Miniature registry so that they would no longer taint the TLBAA's standard registry.

One problem with this plan was that the TLBAA wanted to also see if it would be possible to “clean-up” a portion of their registry since it is a well-known fact that impurities had been injected into their registry since the books were closed by both miniature and standard-sized breeders. As a result, the TLBAA made a rule that all miniatures must pass a visual inspection for purity before they would be permitted to enter the new miniature registry. This noble plan to have a small portion of their registry policed for breed-purity actually derailed their primary objective of quarantining the suspect animals to a new registry because none of these suspect animals passed the visual inspection and were not permitted into the new miniature registry. There was no mechanism to remove the suspect animals from the registry, so they were forced to remain in the standard TLBAA registry – making the goal of eliminating impurities from the standard registry unattainable. When the breeders and owners of these suspect animals were told that their animals would not be granted miniature papers because they showed signs of breed impurity it created a massive outcry, which ultimately resulted in these members leaving the TLBAA and starting their own registry. This strange turn of events allowed the TLBAA to achieve their primary goal of removing these suspect animals from the main TLBAA registry.

Sadly, the goal of creating a quarantine registry that allowed animals from the standard TLBAA registry to enter the miniature registry but would not allow animals from the miniature registry to ever return to the standard registry is the reason why this new miniature registry is a complete failure. Since the only portion of the TLBAA registry that is policed for breed purity is the miniature registry, there is very little risk of injecting additional impurities if these animals were to return to the standard registry.

Breeders of Texas Longhorns understand that the breed is genetically very diverse and there is very little predictability when it comes to the frame score (size) of offspring. Most standard-sized breeders will eventually produce a small-framed Texas Longhorn and all miniature breeders will eventually produce an animal that is too large to be considered a miniature. Sadly, with the quarantine structure of the TLBAA’s miniature Texas Longhorn registry, the larger framed cattle produced by miniature breeders cannot be marketed to other Texas Longhorn breeders because they are not desirable to miniature breeders and standard-sized breeders have no interest in adding an animal into their breeding programs that must have all of their offspring registered as miniatures (regardless of size). This problem has resulted in many Texas Longhorns that are too large to be considered miniatures being housed in the miniature registry. What this has done is devalued the miniature registry because miniature registration papers do not mean that the animal is a miniature. In fact, there are no rules that dictate that an animal must be a miniature in terms of height to be reclassified as a miniature. Cattle that are too tall to be considered miniatures are not permitted to compete as miniatures but are also not permitted to enter TLBAA sanctioned events in standard-size classes. Ironically, a small-framed animal with standard TLBAA papers is highly marketable to all TLBAA members but a small-framed animal with miniature papers is only marketable to a fraction of a percent of the TLBAA’s membership.

Due to the restrictive nature of the TLBAA’s miniature registry, many breeders do not want to devalue their cattle by reclassifying them as miniatures. With the only reason to reclassify animals as miniatures being that they must be registered as miniatures to compete as miniatures in TLBAA sanctioned events, there is little incentive for most breeders to reclassify their cattle. Especially since there are very few TLBAA events that feature miniatures and since there are so few registered miniatures, there is rarely

any real competition at these events. So, unless a breeder is content with bragging about a win by default, there is very little incentive to enter a miniature in TLBAA events.

What I find so entertaining is that the catalyst for splitting the TLBAA registry was that “miniatures deviated so substantially from the main breed standard.” The actual portion of the TLBAA’s breed standard that pertains to the physical size of Texas Longhorns is as follows:

- Desirable = “Adequate for age”
- Objectionable = “Small for age, extremely over-sized”

These standards are so vague that it leads me to believe that the only reason why this language is in the breed standards is that they are policing for falsified birth dates. Texas Longhorns are the only recognized breed of cattle that spans the full range of frame scores. Most other cattle breeds fluctuate between two frame scores, not thirteen frame scores like Texas Longhorns. So, the entire justification for splitting the registry and developing new breed standards for miniatures was and is completely flawed.

The separation of the miniatures into their own registry was a failed experiment. If the TLBAA truly wants to promote the miniatures and see the interest in these small-framed Texas Longhorns increase, they should dissolve the miniature registry. All cattle currently registered as miniatures should be moved back into the standard registry and once there is a critical mass of small-framed animals in the registry - then develop show classes using the Hereford model where the deciding factor on whether an animal competes in a miniature class or standard class is height. Until there is sufficient interest and number of small-framed animals in the registry, allow these animals to compete in all TLBAA events – even if they are at a disadvantage and will likely not win. All TLBAA members should be permitted to participate in all TLBAA events instead of being segregated and excluded.

If the TLBAA wants to clean up their registry of impurities, they need to devote considerable effort to educating the public and members about breed purity and our breed standards. Through education, people will understand what a Texas Longhorn is supposed to look like and they will not purchase the impure cattle. Once the market dries-up for impure Texas Longhorns, breeders will no longer have an incentive to select for traits that are not traditionally found in Texas Longhorns. Additionally, the TLBAA needs to stop rewarding breed impurity in their competitions and actually enforce their breed standards. This was demonstrated at the 2013 World Show where breed purity was put at a disadvantage and therefor providing more motivation for members to select for traits that are traditionally not found in Texas Longhorns.

Once upon a time I was a tremendous supporter of the TLBAA Miniature registry. However, as my breeding program matured and I strived to improve the horn and conformation of miniatures, I sought out animals that would improve these traits even if they were not miniatures. Eventually, I will produce what I consider to be the perfect miniature Texas Longhorn but it will be a long process that will produce a lot of work-product along the way. When I realized that there was no way to market my TLBAA registered Miniature Texas Longhorns that were too large to be considered miniatures even if they had exceptional pedigrees, it became evident that this registry was a marketing liability rather than an asset.

As a result, I have personally abandoned the TLBAA's Miniature registry and have dual-registered all my cattle with the ITLA and have registered all calves through the ITLA. Eventually, I may return to the TLBAA if it makes good business sense.