Miniature zebu cattle’s popularity has grown to explosive levels in the past decade. Miniature zebu are the smallest of the miniature cattle breeds and the only naturally occurring miniature breed maturing to heights under 42” at the back and most being 36” to 38”. They are a member of the Bos Indicus breeds or humped cattle. Their exceptionally small, manageable size (about the size of a large goat breed), and pleasant disposition (they are often considered a family pet) plus a very long, productive life span make these cattle of particular value and winsomeness. They are intelligent, hearty, clean, disease resistant and adapted to high heat conditions, being native to tropical climates.

Zebu are utilized for many different uses worldwide and the whole spectrum of their diversity goes back to their roots. Miniature zebu origins go back to primarily western Asia. There are several genetic donors that make up the miniature zebu we know and love today; some of the donors being Chittagong Valley Red Cattle, Northern Bengal Grey, Vechur, Kasaragod, and several others all of which are on the brink of extinction in their areas of origin. In their origins zebu had to be very tough to withstand the climate and be efficient browsers to sustain and thrive. In addition, there was an absence of intense breeding programs causing zebu to occur through natural selection and survival of the fittest. These evolutionary processes lead the way for the miniature Bos indicus cattle we have today and have allowed them to flourish and thrive in even the toughest situations.

The zebu cattle are excellent foragers and even browsers. Zebu are more inclined to eat brushy vegetation and have a much more diverse pallet than Bos Taurus breeds, cattle of primarily European descent. It has been noted that these cattle will actually forage on brush and vines before making use of grass pasture. This browsing drive stems from their origins in a very arid climate with limited grazing. Zebu had to adapt to survive in that climate and region to sustain any viable populations of cattle. Given that browsing tendency in addition to their meniscal frame size miniature zebu are able to make more use of pasture than standard Bos Taurus cattle (most European influenced breeds) and even miniature Bos Taurus breeds. With their reduced frame size and being the smallest of the bovine breeds one can graze zebu on a fraction of the acreage needed for any other breed of cattle whether
miniature or standard. Some have even claimed that miniature zebu tend to forage more like a goat than most cattle. One hunting enthusiast and property owner in north Central Texas was quoted as saying, “miniature zebu are the only cattle to keep on properties I manage. They are less destructive to the property given their moderate hoof and body size and will eat brush that tends to choke out the ability for wildlife to thrive. They also will dive right into the brush and graze.”

Miniature zebu are a long producing bovine. They will continue to reproduce well into their twenties. In addition to hardiness; conformation and athleticism play a large factor in this. They are very angular cattle and are at their core all about moderation, balance and proportion relative to size. Zebu are moderate in frame size and bone structure which also carries into their body capacity. This allows zebu to continue to be mobile for foraging purposes well into their later years in life. The moderation of frame size allows their structure and joint to withstand the rigors of life and travel much farther in the drive for forage. Part of the angularity of the zebu is also the natural slope to the rump which allows for ease of calving which also allows them to be as productive into the latter years of their life as the first years.

The mammary system of a zebu has also evolved for hardiness. While they are not profound producers of gallons of milk per milking they have been documented to produce upwards of a gallon per day while still nursing a calf. Zebu have close well attached mammary systems with even well attached distinct quarters. Zebu cows are not prone to mastitis, due to a very well attached udder and tight ducts which do not allow the introduction of bacteria into the mammary system. The milk of miniature zebu cattle is outstanding, with a butterfat content of up to five percent, and with a smaller fat globule size from that of other dairy breeds, making the milk easily digestible. This milk is considered to have medicinal properties and there has been some research claiming that the milk from such cattle helps lower the risk of many chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, autism, allergies, schizophrenia, SIDS, and cardiac disease. The miniature zebu breed carries the A2 beta casein gene variant which has been linked to a lower incidence in these as well.

Owning a miniature zebu is a step towards sustainability and independence from the denatured food being turned out by factory farming. This is all put into a compact hardy animal that will sustain in even the toughest conditions. Here is the perfect cow for individuals and families, one that does not represent a huge carbon footprint and can provide healthy, rich raw milk, beef, companionship, and living historical art on small acreage.

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