

First full-blood Wagyu female born in U.S.

Wagyu heifer born in Ore. . . .

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SILVERTON, Ore. — The first full-blood Wagyu heifer born outside of Japan arrived in the United States last week with the birth of Fujiko at Richard and Marcie Hammond's ranch in Oregon.

Fujiko, born June 24 weighing 55 pounds — petite compared with traditional American cattle breeds — was sired by the famous Japanese bull Haruki II.

The dam is Okutani, whose fertilized embryo, implanted in a recipient cow, was purchased for \$50,000 by the Hammonds from Buck Wright of New Era Genetics in Genesee, Idaho.

Wright and his partners arranged for the importation of full-blood Wagyu genetics to the United States.

"She's a little sweetie. She got her earring (Wednesday morning June 29) and her little tattoo. She is a duly marked and recorded animal," said Marcie Hammond.

Fujiko joins a herd of 23 high percentage purebred Wagyus at the Hammonds' 42-acre ranch near Silverton, east of Salem.

Until now, all of the Wagyu produced in the United States were crossbreds. That's because only semen from full-blood Wagyu bulls was allowed out of Japan.

There has never before been a full-blood Wagyu female in this country, and without one there was no way to establish a full-blood herd, Hammond said.

"The importation of new genetics was desperately needed because up until a year ago we were working with only four sire lines," Hammonds said. "With these new genetics it is just a matter getting the numbers up."

The Hammonds expect their



WAGYU WONDER — The first American-Born fullblood Wagyu female, Fujiko, born June 24 at the Richard and Marcie Hammond ranch near Silverton, Ore., is expected to do wonders for the U.S. cattle industry's genetics. Fujiko, shown here with Marcie Hammond, is the first fullblood Wagyu female born outside of Japan. (Capital Press photo by Ed Merriman)

newborn calf to be fertile by the time she's six to seven months old. The heifer will be the foundation the first herd of American-bred full-blood Wagyus.

Another Oregon ranching couple, Scott and Karen Knox of Gold Beach, have two full-

blood Wagyu embryos in recipient cows and were expecting female calves to be born before the end of June.

Between the Hammonds and the Scotts, Oregon for now will have all of the full-blood Wagyu females in the country.

"The state of Oregon as far as I know has all the females

at this point," said Hammond. "These females will of course produce full-blood bulls, too, so we will be sitting pretty."

In Japan, Wagyu cattle are prized because of their flavorful meat marbled with fat. The Wagyu breed is high in unsaturated fat, which according to some research can lower blood cholesterol, Hammond said.

Wagyu meat is so sought-after in Japan that a prime cut of steak sells for as much as \$180 per pound. Demand is also growing in the United States, where there's a 2-year waiting list for gourmet restaurants wanting top-quality, fat-marbled Wagyu meat.

"In our country we are tending to go to a value-added meat product," Hammond said, adding that Wagyu offers the quick-fix genetics that can improve the U.S. herd in terms of production of top quality, fat-marbled meat.

"Even in times of low prices for beef cattle, when you produce for the top end of the market, you'll do well," Hammond said. "We Americans will always want to go to restaurants and have a fine steak, and if we don't get a fine steak we are disappointed."

The Hammonds plan to keep their herd all females. All bulls born on the ranch that meet their standards will be sold for breeding stock and bulls that don't meet their standards will be castrated and sold as steers.

The Wagyu breed's high-quality meat, combined with Oregon's reputation for quality, should make good marketing companions, Hammond said.

Wagyu may help advance plans to develop a high-tech meat processing plant in Oregon to supply beef tailored for export to Japan and other Pacific Rim countries, Hammond said.