



Terry Ness is just in the beginning stages of building his buffalo herd. Active for nearly a year, Ness' hobby and business has grown to fourteen of the large, shaggy-maned, hump-shouldered animal. . . . Foto News.



A female buffalo, called a cow, tends to her 3-day-old calf. The cow is very protective of her young, according to Ness. . . . Foto News.



Located on the Spirit Flowage, Ness has named his growing project the Buffalo Spirit Farm. In time Ness hopes to have 30-50 buffalo roaming his territory southwest of Tomahawk. . . . Foto News.

Raising buffalo speaks of American history and heritage

Buffalo were in the United States before man and at one time, history records that there were more than sixteen million buffalo roaming the open spaces. Terry Ness of Tomahawk recalls that his dad who was born in the late 1800's worked on the trains going West as a young lad and told of the huge numbers and herds he had seen in the Western territories. His father recalls the great slaughters of the buffalo herds in the late 1800's and early 1900's. At one time there were only about 1100 buffalo left in the world and through conservationists and concerned citizens, there are now 60,000-70,000 animals in the U.S.

"My dad always wanted a buffalo," remembers Ness. "So my personal interest in the animal goes back a few years." As a conservationist and a promoter of "Save the Buffalo," Ness began his buffalo farm about a year ago. Ness joins about 900 other Americans in the American and National Buffalo Association who believe in protecting America's heritage. "The uniqueness of raising buffalo is that we're trying to regain a part of our American history," says Ness. The national organizations promote "Save the Buffalo" as well as provide up-to-date knowledge and basic know-how on the buffalo's needs, medical requirements and habits.

Ness, who finds the buffalo a challenge, is raising his herd for quality breeding stock and eventually for edible meat. His complete herd is certified and vaccinated by the Wisconsin Veterinarian Association. The usual ratio of a large herd of buffalo is one bull to every ten cows. In order to avoid interbreeding, a buffalo farmer, according to Ness, needs to get a new bull every three or four years.

"Buffalo meat is becoming very popular, especially out West," comments Ness. The demand for the meat is growing as health clubs and diet groups nationwide began promoting buffalo meat. The low fat, low calorie meat has a lower cholesterol count than even chicken and fish.

Buffalo are a very independent animal. Ness says, "You can lead a buffalo anywhere he wants to go." And one doesn't argue with an animal that can weigh as much as 3000 pounds. The average weight of a cow varies from 800-1200 pounds, while the bull usually weighs in at 2,000 pounds and up to as much as 3,000 pounds.

For an animal that can't be trusted in terms of temperament—docile one minute, charging the next, buffalo are not a difficult animal to keep fenced in. "Once the buffalo establishes his territory," Ness says, "you barely need a fence."

The temperamental animal can survive off the land if necessary. They will eat bushes, grass and leaves and according to Ness, you need 10 acres of land for each buffalo. In actuality, it is very inexpensive to feed the buffalo. They eat five times a day, but don't require any special foods. Ness supplements their field grazing with a feeder full of hay.

The buffalo is kept outside year 'round. The thick layer of hair keeps the animal warm even in the coldest of winter. "The buffalo is the only animal that will face the cold winter winds," comments Ness. Unlike cows or horses who turn away from the wind, the buffalo will not freeze in winter, as the wind blows it keeps the animal's hair down next to the body. Every spring the buffalo loses its hair. In the buying market, the hair is treated and used like wool.

Ness, who has a great deal of respect for the beast, looks ahead and talks about building a herd of buffalo numbering 30-50. "I have raised all kinds of animals in my life," recalls Ness, "cats, dogs, beef, horses, but I like the buffalo. It is the only animal I have worked with that does not fear man." That is a challenge for Ness and an adventure! FN