

Florida Cattleman: A Gateway of Goodwill to the World
By
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It's quite a surprise to see the Premier of the Republic of Macedonia wearing a Stetson, and perhaps even more of a surprise to learn that Florida cattle ranchers are working on exporting live animals to the southern most part of the former Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia, but this is the cultural and economic bridge being extended around the world by two Florida cattlemen: Bud Adams and Jim Strickland.

Build a bridge; change the world, if there is a beginning point in establishing human relations with countries that bare economic fruition, it is by lending a hand to populations that are deficient in protein due to their geographic location, political turmoil, and difficulty in moving from a socialist to a capitalist economy. An initiative in this direction was pursued by Adams (The Adams Ranch, Ft. Pierce), Strickland Ranch, Myakka) and Parke Wright in 2003 when Wright negotiated a shipment of cattle to Cuba. Although the 1962 trade embargo remains in effect by the U.S., in October 2003 Adams, Strickland, and Wright traveled to Cuba under a seal obtained from the U.S. Department Treasury to do business there under legislation signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 2000 that permits direct sale of agricultural and humanitarian products to the country. Today, many U.S. corporations such as Cargill and Monsanto are shipping grain and seed products into Cuba through the permission of Pedro Alvarez, Director of Cuba's government owned Alimport Company. Cargill, which has been doing business with Cuba since 2000 in the amount of 300,000 tons of a wide variety of food products, recently signed a \$4 million contract to sell wheat and soy protein to the island.

In a *Florida Trend Magazine* article, Tim Lynch, Director Emeritus of the Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis at Florida State University, said prior to 1959, Florida was Cuba's largest state trading partner with only a "trickle" of agriculture being sent today. He forecasts that with a normalization of trade between Cuba and the U.S., it could result in a \$1.3 billion to \$2.5 billion growth in the Florida GDP over the next 30 years.

The 2003 cattle shipment to Cuba was scheduled to include 80 Brangus from Strickland's ranch, 80 Braford's from the Adams Ranch and 80 Beef Masters. The heifers, with three bulls from each breed, comprised the Florida shipment valued at half million dollars. However, before the cattle could leave from Port Manatee in March for Port Mariel in Cuba, a Washington state cow slaughtered in December was diagnosed with "mad cow" disease or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). The affected dairy cow originated in Canada that allegedly allowed animal parts to be added to cattle feed. Thus, Cuba and a number of other countries banned the import of U.S. beef and the deal was postponed.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits the addition of animal parts to feed," Adams added. Wright, whose family began shipping cattle to Cuba in 1850 (Lykes Brothers) had previously arranged the sale of 150 Vermont and New York dairy cows to Cuba in a similar transaction.

When the trio visited the island, they were escorted to the western pastures by host Ramon Castro, elder brother of Fidel. Adams said the tour was an “eye opener as the Cuban people had consumed most of the cattle and they needed beef and milk to feed the people. After the Soviets departed from Cuba leaving behind many unfulfilled promises, Ramon Castro said the Soviets were supposed to leave fuel and fertilizer to gear the island’s agriculture towards growing feed for chickens and hogs. When Russia pulled out, crops couldn’t grow resulting in the people being denied protein with an unbalanced diet of beans, rice, and sugar. There isn’t enough protein and meat in Cuba for young people at a developing age,” Adams added. “When Fidel came into power, Cuba had a progressive cattle industry but Castro said that everyone could eat beef. Prior to Castro, beef was reserved only for the rich. So they slaughtered the entire cow herd and then there was no beef. But, Cuba has great grass and a good climate similar to Florida; our cattle can easily adapt. Although the Soviets left no tractors, cows can till the soil eating grass. Seed stock herds provide bulls for breeding to build a commercial herd for slaughter. The Soviets also did not come through in price support for sugar, so good grass is available from former sugar land. Cuba has good cattlemen and veterinarians; the problem they face is how to do things. They are interested in the American way of raising cattle,” Adams explained.

Adams and Strickland were the first American ranchers to go to Cuba since the embargo to help negotiate beef sales. After Cuba lifted its ban on the importation of U.S. beef, Pedro Alvarez sent a letter to Jim Strickland as the first country to accept live cattle from the U.S. Adams was approached again by the Cuban government to send a shipment of

cattle. “By this time, the eight month old heifer calves were fourteen months. If they wanted another crop they would have to wait until the next year,” said Adams. These negotiations continued every year but he never received a contract for delivery. “It’s easy for me every day to sell cattle in the U.S. For example, I recently shipped some ten year olds to Texas for \$1,100, it not hard to sell our cattle, but it is a pain to deal with Cuba.”

Several years later, Adams did join in with Strickland through Wright in selling a small number of cattle to Cuba. “Anytime there is a transaction, it’s a good deal. Cuba is only 90 miles away from a good market and they need cattle,” Adams added. Cuba today buys “shipments of dairy cows from Canada,” said Strickland.

Importing cattle to Cuba involves lengthy contracts, health protocols, clearances, quarantines, shipping regulations, and people to make financial arrangements. “Cuba deals in ‘cash only’ transactions as part of the U.S. requirement that Cuba not be extended any credit; it is a complicated process as money has to go through many channels before the ship leaves the dock with cattle aboard for Port Mariel. It is the hardest country to deal with,” Strickland said. “When a cowman sells a cow today, he expects to get paid today,” Adams emphasized. “Even though it is easier to sell cattle in the United States, exporting cattle is subject to change. In a good year, when there is a surplus of cattle in the U.S., new markets are good.”

One caveat to exporting cattle to Cuba is “bluetongue,” a viral infection from a gnat that occurs in southern Florida and the Western Hemisphere. It doesn’t dramatically affect the health of cattle but is tested for on imports to Cuba due to its transmutability to sheep, one of the largest herds in Cuba. “A University of Florida virologist said that even if a cow tests positive for bluetongue, there is no danger of the strain affecting the herd,” Strickland said. According to the National Library of Medicine, serological surveys of cattle, sheep, and goats confirm that bluetongue virus (BTV) is common in Florida, Puerto Rico and St. Croix in the U.S. and in other Caribbean countries including Guyana and Suriname in South America. Bluetongue is a dormant disease present with different strains and has been present since the 1940’s in Florida cattle.

In terms of other world markets, “there is a strong demand for boxed or live beef and by-products such as hides and tripe,” Strickland said. “There is an export market open for live cattle that does help to change the price structure of cattle in the United States.”

In June of 2007, Swift and Company was purchased by J&F Participacoes S.A. of Brazil, the largest beef processor in that country for \$225 million, assuming \$1.2 billion in debt, according to an article by Troy Marshall in *Beef Magazine* that provides the company with access to the two largest beef markets in the world: The United States and Asia with potential sales of nearly \$12 billion and an increase in its beef-processing capacity; Brazilian beef is currently banned from Asia. “There is a demand for beef in Romania and other countries and presently we are working on a bid for cattle exports to Honduras. On July 18, 2007, we sent the first American shipment of pure bred Brahman heifers and

bulls off of Duck Smith's son, Dan Smith's, Wauchula Crescent Bar D ranch to Guyana, as well as the first pure bred Brangus cattle from Little Creek Farm in Alachua," said Strickland. He is also flying to Guyana at the end of August 2007 with a forage specialist from the University of Florida to sign a reciprocal agreement with the University in Guyana for exchange of information to help them with the Guyana ranch project. Other markets Renee and Jim Strickland are pursuing are Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Macedonia and potentially Moscow," said Strickland.

In the foreign markets, including Cuba, Adams said that "composite" cattle are more functional as they are "a hybrid cow that has increased production up to 25%. In composite cows, one breed compliments the other with more efficient conformation. An open-ended program brings in various types of bulls with selection to improve the herd," Adams explained. Always looking to expand the Florida cattle market, Adams is also experimenting with a new Hemarthria grass that can grow year round. The Florida variety of Hemarthria is providing year round growth in South Florida.

"The price of exports all over the world is set by supply and demand. The more markets the stronger the demand," explained Strickland, "Florida beef is the best in the world. We do not have hoof-and-mouth as other beef producing countries that are not eligible to go into Cuba. But a lot of countries are working to clean up cattle diseases."

"We have a good export market now in Central and South America," stated Strickland.

"Florida cattlemen are in a position to help those countries with live animals. To further

the ability for exports to be shipped to international destinations, we are working to build a permanent quarantine facility in Indiantown; it's now a temporary station. Presently, exports are permitted by the United States Department of Agriculture to ship cattle on a case-by-case basis," he added.

"The cost to renovate the current quarantine facility is approximately \$135,000, as it needs concrete and a roof. We can use prison labor to cut costs. It is a facility where international buyers can visit and see cattle displayed. Bud Adams has displayed his bulls there. The facility can hold 150-175 cattle. Charles Bronson, Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture and Doyle Conner of the Florida Agriculture Department, endorse the idea of displaying cattle to potential buyers. The permanent facility status requires USDA sanction," said Strickland.

Strickland believes that Japan, famous for their very expensive "massaged" Kobe beef, "tried to keep U.S. beef banned from import there and used 'mad cow' disease as an excuse to keep their market closed. 'Mad cow' is not contagious and results from adding animals parts to cattle feed that is prohibited in the United States. Today, there are no export limits on cattle to other countries by the State Department, Treasury, or Department of Agriculture." Adams said in U.S. beef market, "we have to compete with imports, but we are efficient enough to compete successfully. We should have a country of origin label law that allows consumers to know if their beef comes from outside the U.S. Our present law is unworkable."

The potential of the Florida cattle industry, both internationally and nationally, is on the precipice of expansion. Both Bud Adams and Jim Strickland are investigating “natural beef” production. Adams said “there may be a market for natural beef. Our cattle are raised on pasture without antibiotics or implants. We would have to find a feeder that would pay for these cattle.” Strickland added that “there is economic potential in producing ‘natural’ beef, requiring a feedlot that does not use hormones.”

Both Bud Adams and Jim Strickland are pioneer cattle ranchers. Adams joined the ranch after graduating from University of Florida in 1948 when Alto Adams, Sr., a Florida Supreme Court Judge bought land in Ft. Pierce, west of town, in 1937 “that no one wanted.” Bud Adams started crossing Hereford and Brahman cattle in 1948 when the original crosses occurred. After twenty years, by 1970, Braford's were designated by the USDA as the first Adams Braford Foundation Herd. Today, Bud Adams' sons and grandchildren manage and operate the Crossed–Seven Ranch where he and his wife, Dot, live in a modest ranch-style home surrounded by fruit trees they planted 59 years ago.

Strickland and his wife Renee own “Strickland Exports” in Myakka and a new company “Strickland Ranch and Exports.” Besides raising cattle, they ship hogs, sheep, goats, and other live animals to markets around the world. Strickland's granddaddy, Andrew Jackson Strickland moved from Georgia to Florida in the 1800s; Jim Strickland is a fourth generation cattle rancher, second Vice President of the Florida Cattleman's Association, and agricultural property appraiser in Manatee County.

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