Raramuri Criollo, a cattle breed adapted to semi-arid and arid rangelands, which produces high quality meat

For the past twenty years, drought has strongly affected the southwest United States and northwest Mexico. This cross border region can best be described as arid to semi-arid, with annual precipitation of less than 16 inches. Choosing cattle breeds, and genetically selecting for cattle which are adapted to this type of climate, and topography in order to maximize the feed resources without degrading them is an ongoing process in the region. The Criollo breed, originally from North Africa and Spain, and naturalized throughout the Americas for the past 500 years, is a type of cattle which seems to be well adapted to the drought conditions currently prevalent in the region. They also appear to utilize a larger percentage of the landscape by grazing on steep hill sites, and rocky terrain. In addition, they have been observed grazing a broader cross section of plant types including shrubs, trees, and cacti than northern European breeds. However, a common misconception is that meat from this breed is inferior to that of European breeds. This study compared the meat quality of 31 steers of purebred Criollo (10 Raramuri Criollo, 12 Mexican Criollo [Corrientes]), and crossbred Criollo (9 Waguli x Raramuri Criollo). The objective was to measure the differences between purebred, and crossbred animals as an indication of their potential for meat quality. The study showed that the main differences are between purebred, and crossbred animals. But overall, the meat of these cattle raised on rangelands with no grain feeding is well marbled, and lean. Moreover, the meat is exceptionally tender (average ranging between 4.4 and 4.8 pounds/cm²). Finally, the meat presents a high percentage of omega 9 (between 30.93 and 35.19 %), and a low ratio omega 6:3 (between 0.55 and 0.72), which means that the meat is very healthy.