



Bison

Pte Oyate



Lakota/Dakota/Nakota terms: *Pte Oyate* (buffalo nation/people), *tatanka* (buffalo, buffalo bull), *pte* (cow, root word for most buffalo terms), *pte hiŋćala* (buffalo calf).

Lakota bison philosophy: White Buffalo Calf Maiden brought spiritual teachings and ceremonies that included buffalo. “For centuries, there has existed a sacred covenant between the *Pte Oyate* and the *Lakota Oyate*,” comments Jim Garrett, Dupree, SD, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, “The people were ...pledge[d] that the buffalo would always be there for the *Lakota*. In return, the people used the buffalo for their every need and developed over 100 ways to use the bison. The *Lakota* people have modeled their societal values and belief system after the buffalo society.”

Ancestry: Buffalo / Bison (*Bison bison*) are closely related to the European Wisent and can readily interbreed. A larger ancestor came to America over the Bering Strait land bridge about 25,000 years ago. The American bison usually will not produce healthy or fertile offspring when crossed with cattle.

Similarities to cattle: both are ruminants (chew cud, have four stomachs), have split hooves, are susceptible to many of the same diseases and parasites, have a well-defined social status as herd animals, have a similar length of gestation, and naturally give birth in April & May.

Differences from cattle: Bison can run 24 miles without stopping (they have a much larger windpipe than cattle); can jump a 6 ft. fence; tolerate cold better; can run faster and turn sharper than a horse; can be a dangerous, wild animal to strangers; most heifers have their first calf at age three (vs. two years in cattle) unless they get supplemental feed most of the time. They move around much more than most breeds of cattle. They grow slower than cattle, so take longer to get to a market weight.

Population and use: In the early 1800s there were at least 30 million bison in North America. By 1890 there were less than 1000 bison left. Now there are more than 400,000 in North America with about 220,000 in the US. This population increase is primarily because there is a market for bison meat. More than 50,000 were harvested for meat in the US in 2011.

Bison meat: Federal regulations prohibit the use of artificial growth hormones in bison, and bison industry protocols prohibit the use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics in feed. Bison meat is leaner than skinless chicken breast, and has more iron than any other red meat.

Sitting Bull College bison herd: Sitting Bull College purchased their first six bison as calves in 2000. The herd now numbers 24. We keep the yearlings for weighing in a grazing demonstration. Some expenses for the grazing demonstration come from USDA grant funds. The reason Sitting Bull College established this herd is to provide an educational, research and demonstration resource for programs on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, and to eventually provide funds for educational programs.

The Sitting Bull College Extension Education Program: Most years SBC conducts one-day workshops on Sustainable Agriculture, and Bison Care & Culture, two bison hide brain-tanning workshops (7 days each); support Culture Camps for children; and conduct the grazing trials.

Links for more bison information: North Dakota Bison Association: <http://www.ndbuffalo.org/> ; National Bison Association: <http://www.bisoncentral.com/> ;

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