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## Traditional Cow Fights

Cow fights are traditional throughout the region where the Eringer breed is raised in Central Valais, Lower Valais, and the Aoste Valley in Northern Italy. They take place in late spring when the animals are released

have met with great success. In contrast to bull-fighting, cow-fighting is a bloodless and relatively tame sport. It is more of a locking-of-horns-and-shoving match, really. Each battle is quite an impressive sight, though: A cow



Heads knock, horns lock...

from their winter barns. More than other cow breeds, these small but hearty black creatures with short robust horns have retained the hierarchical organization that is instinctive to any animal society. Thus, at the start of spring, they battle amongst themselves to determine the pecking order for leading the herd to summer in the high mountain pastures.

The fights don't occur in an organized fashion: Each cow chooses her opponent. However, competitions have been held in the last several years to determine the Queen of the region or canton. Live national television broadcasts of these folkloric competitions

stops grazing, lowers her head, snorts noisily and scrapes the ground with her hind hooves. If a cow of equal strength takes up the challenge, she will move towards the first with the same snorting and scraping. The approach is slow and careful. The fight begins in a fury, heads knock, horns lock, each cow searching for a good hold. Then they lean in and press with all their might, advancing and re-treating with each gust of strength. After a battle, which can last anywhere up to several minutes, the loser does an about face and runs away, with her victorious rival in hot pursuit, striking out with a few more jabs of the horns.

## The Eringer Breed

Eringer cows are bred almost exclusively in the Valais and the Aoste Valley, Italy. A herdbook was established in 1917. In 2001, 6200 breeding females were registered, with 181 males in what is elegantly described as "in natural service" and 10 used for artificial insemination.



The Eringer breed has a black/red/brown coat and pronounced horns. They are bred for milk and meat – and are also used for "vegetation management".

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