



# MyHerd Expands to Online DNA Requests

*Request DNA forms through your MyHerd account and send them off the same day.*

by *Kayla M. Wilkins*

Historically, requesting DNA tests through the American Hereford Association (AHA) has been restricted to typical office hours — Monday through Friday. Members could only request forms by connecting with a staff member via phone call or e-mail.

Although this process did work effectively, it sometimes left producers waiting because of the time constraint. If a member requested a form after hours on a Friday, it was not until Monday that staff could respond to that individual's need.

With the increase in the popularity of DNA testing over subsequent years and the availability of technology, the AHA knew a more streamlined process was possible. In response to member needs, the AHA recently added the ability for members to request DNA tests via their *MyHerd.org* account.

## Increasing efficiency

The online process not only fixes the challenges faced with making DNA test requests in the past but also comes with added benefits to the producer.

"The overall efficiency of doing things online in real time is the most impressive thing about MyHerd," says SyAnn Foster,

AHA education and information service coordinator. "With DNA in particular, this gives producers the ability to not only request new DNA tests but view results of any test at any time."

The goal of efficiency is also resonating with producers utilizing MyHerd. Collectively, the members employing the program have been able to better organize their data while also increasing effectiveness on the business side of the operation. For Sheila Jensen, Courtland, Kan., it is all about the simplicity and convenience. She says it is valuable for her to find anything she needs in terms of her records in a central location.

"I think it is awesome that I can get a form online and print it immediately any time I want," Jensen says. "Then I can also check the status of my DNA test from submission to results."

Jensen is not alone. Other producers are discovering the same benefit and more. On

Kevin Schultz's operation in southwestern Kansas, he says utilizing the online platform available frees him to work on DNA data at any time and to track progress on his results.

"If the office is closed and I need to work on my DNA information I can do it on the weekends, 24-hours a day versus restricting myself to AHA office hours," says Schultz, the 2016 breed improvement chair for the AHA Board of Directors.

With DNA being a daunting and complex task for many producers, Dave Bielema, the 2016 member service chair for the AHA Board, says the inception of the online DNA request submission aids in streamlining the process while also making it as simple as possible for members.

"If I decide to DNA a cow today, I can print out her sample submission form and could probably send in the hair specimen tonight," he says. "In 20

minutes from now we could put it in the mail."

As Jensen mentions, having the status of all DNA tests requested in one central location is another valuable piece MyHerd offers. Producers can see the test status or results of any calf they have ever tested through one location on their account.

Foster explains, "It is helpful that you can view your test status, results and even see what animals you've tested. Producers can see what the results were and then use technology with genomically enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs) to make more accurate breeding decisions."

From an Association standpoint, Bielema says the online submission form and other features in MyHerd provide the most timely customer service possible to producers. He says MyHerd does all basic customer service tasks in real time without involving the staff.

"It is about as timely of a method as we can provide right now with improvements coming all the time," Bielema adds.

With this method, Bielema says, AHA staff is then free to aid producers with more technical problems they may encounter. In short, the ever-evolving program

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is aiding in the efficiency of the office to, in turn, provide the best service to the membership.

#### Benefits of DNA tests

Today, DNA testing cattle in an operation is key for a variety of reasons. Producers can opt to use DNA samples to test for genetic abnormalities (hypotrichosis, dilutor and idiopathic epilepsy), pedigree verification and polled homozygosity and to generate GE-EPDs on their calves.

For Schultz, testing for pedigree verification has proven valuable more times than one. In the past, unbeknownst to him, he has had cows switch calves at birth, and it was not until DNA results came through in the fall that he found out about the change. He says heritage testing only aids in the accuracy of his operation's program.

"I started doing DNA testing prior to our sale so I did not sell a bull or female and find out later, when a customer did the DNA work, that it was an incorrect pedigree," he says. "So I did it to make sure we were getting it right prior to the sale."

From the GE-EPD side, Schultz adds that testing also aids in the accuracy for breeding decisions. With the use of GE-EPDs, he explains he is able to make more accurate and timely breeding decisions on a calf at a younger age. He says it is crucial producers adopt these new technologies and use them as a tool to better the industry.

"Our responsibility as breeders for the commercial industry is to find the best genetics possible and genomics help us do that faster," he explains.

On the Jensen operation, GE-EPDs have worked as yet another tool to assure that the Jensens are providing customers the best product possible.

"We utilize DNA-enhanced EPDs for our sale bulls to help provide our customers with a more proven product," Jensen explains.

Bielema agrees in saying GE-EPDs are where DNA sampling becomes an integral part in terms of breed improvement.

"It is about breed improvement and it is about being a leader amongst breeds. The Hereford breed has really lead genetic evaluation and genomic improvement and this is one of the ways we do that," he explains. "Four or five years ago the AHA appealed to members to start

collecting DNA because the more we know about our breed, the better we can document it, and the better we can represent it."

#### How to obtain a sample

If a producer wishes to obtain a sample from a calf, there are a few different avenues to do so. Historically, hair samples have been the most used option. However, AHA has offered blood cards as an option and now Tissue Sampling Units (TSU) for producers wishing to collect a tissue sample from their calves.

There are benefits to each method that can aid a producer in a variety of ways. AHA Director of Records Stacy Sanders says while hair sampling is free to the producer, blood cards or TSUs can prove to be the better option in some cases. For example, a TSU can be collected on very young calves as part of the normal tagging routine. "In turn, this option not only is the most convenient but also provides the option for a member to have the sample secured should he/she ever decide to DNA test that calf," he says.

Using TSUs is one of the newest ways to collect DNA samples and arguably one of the best for the

lab despite the extra cost to the producer, according to Sanders. AHA partnered with Allflex to release TSUs this year. A TSU can be used anytime during a calf's life and offers a reduced-stress option since the sample is collected during tagging. A producer can purchase a TSU for \$2 from the AHA or a customizable five-digit alphanumeric Allflex visual tag and TSU unit together for \$3.75 per unit.

A hair sample should be collected above the tail switch and the hair root should contain the material needed for DNA testing when the calf is three to four months of age. Eighty hairs should be pulled evenly so the hair does not break, and the switch must be dry and brushed clean of all debris. The lab suggests wrapping the hair around a pencil and then pulling. Upon collection, the hair should be placed in a straight line across the center of the sample submission form and sent to the lab.

Lastly, a blood sample is another widely used technique and provides another option for producers wishing to test younger calves. To obtain a blood sample, producers most commonly draw blood from under the tail of the

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calf and then put the sample on a blood card they have purchased from the AHA. Twelve hours should be allotted for the sample to dry before attaching the blood card to the sample submission form being mailed to the lab.

Sanders explains that this new mode of requesting DNA tests through MyHerd is only the beginning of strides the AHA is taking to improve the MyHerd system. He says the over-arching goal of MyHerd and its features is to increase efficiency and accuracy for members and their operations.

"Looking into 2017, AHA has plans for MyHerd to be re-developed to promote mobile use and speed," Sanders says. "AHA is dedicated to aiding producers in reaching their production goals and continuing progress on programs. MyHerd is one avenue to achieve that mission." **HW**

## Tissue Sample Unit offers convenient DNA sample collection

The American Hereford Association (AHA) partnered with Allflex to release Tissue Sampling Units (TSUs) as a method for producers to collect herd DNA samples.

Similar to bloodcards, TSUs can be used at any point in an animal's life, but offer a reduced-stress option since the procedure can be done while tagging, rather than adding an additional step to pull blood or hair.

TSUs also provide a clean sample that is efficient to process.

"Because of technology advancements, we know how to collect DNA without destroying the sample," says Shane Bedwell, AHA director of breed improvement. "A sample can be acquired from the solution while leaving the tissue sample intact."

The procedure to capture a TSU is very similar to adding an ear tag in a calf: load the TSU in the tissue sampling applicator and insert it into the calf's ear. The tissue sample will be in the TSU upon release.

A TSU can be purchased through AHA for \$2.

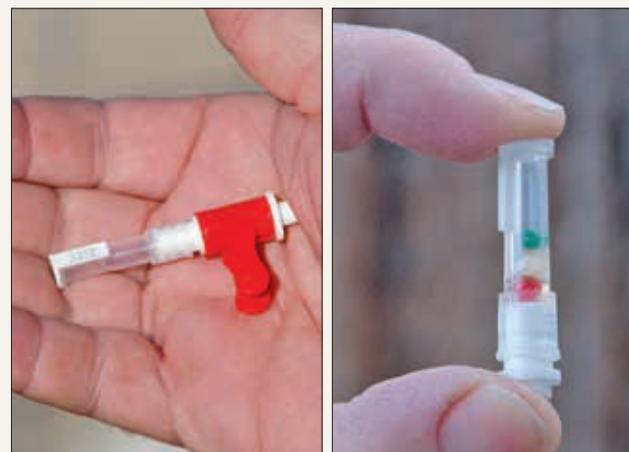
"If you are tagging calf anyway, the TSU provides a very simple DNA collection method," says Stacy Sanders, AHA director of records. "Collect the TSU when you first handle the calf and you can have peace of mind for any future DNA testing needs."

A customizable five-digit alphanumeric Allflex tag and TSU unit can also be purchased together for \$3.75/unit. Order forms can be found at [Hereford.org](http://Hereford.org) on the herd management tools page in the education center. Order forms may be returned to AHA by e-mail, fax or mail.

"The main advantage of TSUs is that they can be stored for a lifetime in a freezer, which provides the luxury of submitting the sample whenever you want," Bedwell said. "TSUs are very proactive and using them is a pretty cheap insurance policy." **HW**



Tissue Sampling Units offer a reduced-stress option to collect herd DNA.



A Tissue Sampling Unit can be purchased through AHA for \$2.