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# HEREFORD WORLD

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## Hereford Loyalty

*The McIrvin family of Diamond M Ranch has been marketing straight Hereford cattle through the CHB® program since its inception 20 years ago.*

by Sara Gugelmeyer

When something works, there's no need to change it. And Hereford cattle have definitely been working for the McIrvin family of Diamond M Ranch in Washington State.

"I've been involved with Hereford cattle all my life and I'm 72 now," says

Len McIrvin, the patriarch of the family operation, which also includes his wife Pat, their son, Bill McIrvin, and grandson, Justin Hedrick, as partners. Capturing value from the Herefords' efficiency all the way, the McIrvin's have always retained ownership on their calves through

the feedyard phase. As the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB)® program celebrates 20 years in 2015, Diamond M Ranch, too, celebrates 20 years of selling cattle to the program. Len McIrvin's fed cattle were some of the first harvested for CHB.

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Diamond M Ranch was the 2014 Western Nugget National Hereford Show Commercial Cattleman Honoree. Pictured at the award presentation are: Mark Holt, AHA fieldman, and Len and Patti McIrvine.



Now on its sixth generation, the Diamond M Ranch has never strayed from the Hereford breed.

"We couldn't ever see the advantage (of using another breed)," McIrvine says. "These Hereford cattle always excel."

Others have noticed too. Len and Pat were honored with the 2014 Lifetime Cattleman Award during the Western Nugget National Show in Reno, Nev.

#### Hereford from the start

The Diamond M Ranch headquarters is right on the Canadian border in northeast Washington. Cattle spend the summers there, grazing beautiful high country. Then in the fall, cattle are shipped south to the winter ranch, which is in southeast Washington, right on the Oregon border.

Diamond M Ranch has been operating this way for decades, with the two locales allowing them to operate a sizeable herd. Starting as a strictly commercial operation in the early 1940s, McIrvine says, they slowly added registered cows and in the '60s that was their focus. Now, though, about 2,500 commercial cows are the family's bread and butter, and 100 registered cows provide seedstock for the commercial herd. About 500 head of heifers are calved out each year as well.

One thing hasn't changed though, all those cows are purebred Hereford. Besides the heifers kept for replacements, all offspring are grown on grass to about 900 lbs. then fed in Nebraska before being marketed to National Beef or Greater Omaha through the Certified Hereford Beef program.

"We never sell a yearling unless it's not healthy enough to feed or

too old, like if a first calf heifer loses a calf," McIrvine says. "We feed everything else."

By retaining ownership on the cattle all the way through to the rail, the McIrvins have kept a balanced approach to trait selection. Their cows are fertile, hardy and efficient and they raise calves which grow well, feed even better and taste good.

#### Efficiency is key

With so many commercial herds going black, why haven't the McIrvins followed suit?

"So many people, it seems to me, want to mongrelize their herd just because people say that's the thing to do," McIrvine says. "They do it with no objective in mind, no end result and not expecting any change in their operation. It's just that some order buyer tells them the cattle would be worth more if they were crossed up. It's so futile to me. I can see no advantage."

Diamond M has a tried-and-true recipe for making beef.

"We wean a 450 lb. calf in the fall because we like to go back to grass with those yearlings. If we weaned a 650 or 700 lb. calf then by the time we got through winter we'd be locked in and have to go straight to the feedyard. Some of our cheapest gain is going back to our own grass with these yearlings."

Then the calves are shipped to the yard at around 900 lb. and fed for about 120 days. The cattle are harvested at about 1,450 to 1,500 lb.

"We hardly ever have a YG 4 in our cattle," McIrvine says. "If they are managed properly they excel in all traits, but if you try to put them in the same pen as Chianina or Gelbvieh, Simmental

Mike Twitchell, co-owner of Sweetwater Cattle Co. in Kearney, Neb., says Hereford cattle are a more efficient breed than most. One-third of cattle fed at Sweetwater Cattle Co. are destined for Certified Hereford Beef.



**“The biggest advantage for us is one more buyer on the market. We’ve sold cattle to other packers, but the high bid takes the cattle. And right now I am getting about a \$25 (per head) premium for my calves qualifying for CHB.”**



— Len McIrvin



Hereford cattle like these will qualify for a premium when marketed through the Certified Hereford Beef program.

or Charolais and try to feed them under the same conditions, it doesn’t work. The Herefords are too efficient so when the whole pen is ready to kill the Hereford is too fat and the feedyard guy says, ‘I’ll never feed another one of them.’ It’s a management thing.”

The McIrvins feed some of their cattle at Sweetwater Cattle Co. in Kearney, Neb. Mike Twitchell is the co-owner and manager and says he’s been impressed from the get-go with McIrvins’ Herefords.

“Len’s cattle are great cattle,” Twitchell explains. “We get the lowest conversion and highest gain out of Diamond M cattle as any. He has a tremendous set of genetics.”

Sweetwater Cattle Co. feeds many destined for Certified Hereford Beef. “About a third of our inventory will be CHB qualifiers,” Twitchell explains. “The CHB program has allowed us to market Hereford cattle at par to above any other breeds.”

And they feed economically, Twitchell says.

“The Hereford cattle are a more efficient breed than most. We get good conversion

and good gains typically out of the Herefords. We like their performance, it’s typically very predictable and they allow us to manage our risk better than some other breeds,” Twitchell says.

Although McIrvin was raising and feeding straight Hereford cattle long before 1995 when CHB came around, he says it’s nice getting that premium for his cattle qualifying for the program.

“The biggest advantage for us is one more buyer on the market,” McIrvin explains. “We’ve sold cattle to other packers, but the high bid takes the cattle. And right now I am getting about a \$25 (per head) premium for my calves qualifying for CHB.”

He adds, “I think that Hereford cattle, as a breed, have definitely received a black eye from some order buyers and feeders and it’s absolutely unwarranted. I can put our Hereford cattle in the feedyard up against any breed or herd in the nation and they can compete. Plus we have so many advantages with Herefords as far as their temperament and they’re easy fleshing and on and on.” **HW**

## Certified Hereford Beef® program specs

### What are the CHB live animal specifications?

- Cattle must have a predominately (51%) whiteface and exhibit white markings over the jaw, forehead and muzzle. White markings on any part of the hip, shoulder or side of the body such as spots, stripes or belts are not acceptable.
- Cattle must be solid red, solid black or roan with a predominately whiteface. Whitefaced animals that are yellow, gray, brown, brindle, or smoke are ineligible.
- Only steers and heifers of English beef-type breeding under 30 months of age qualify — an animal expressing dairy or Bos indicus type breeding is not acceptable.
- To qualify, cattle may be either horned or polled. Bulls, bullocks or cows are not acceptable.

### What are the CHB carcass specifications?

- USDA Select or higher marbling
- Yield Grade 4 and leaner
- 600-1,000 lb. hot carcass weight
- Moderately thick or thicker muscling
- No dark cutters
- A maturity only

Program specs above are abbreviated. To view complete program specs visit [ams.usda.gov](http://ams.usda.gov).



## Certified Hereford Beef® – Two Decades Strong

Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC Supply Chain Manager Trey Befort answers questions on how the Certified Hereford Beef program has benefitted commercial cattlemen and added value to Hereford genetics in the past 20 years.



### How has the CHB program grown demand for Hereford genetics since it started in 1995?

In the last 20 years, Certified Hereford Beef has grown from utilizing close to 32,000 head the first year, to over 230,000 this year. Those numbers prove that the demand and value of Hereford-influenced cattle has grown since the introduction of Certified Hereford Beef.

### What advantages does the CHB program provide to those buying Hereford genetics (bulls or females) in a commercial breeding operation?

By creating demand for Hereford and Hereford-British crossbred cattle, the Certified Hereford Beef program helps to add value to commercial operations utilizing Hereford genetics. As the Hereford breed continues to improve and Certified Hereford Beef continues to grow, I look for this added value to also increase and the demand for CHB cattle to continue to grow.

### What do you expect the marketplace to look like for Hereford genetics in the next 20 years? What role will CHB play in the changing marketplace?

My expectations are high for Certified Hereford Beef and the Hereford breed in general over the next 20 years. As consumers continue to seek a higher-quality protein source, I believe CHB will play a key part in providing just that. With the increased growth of CHB and the continuous improvement of the Hereford breed, I believe the value and demand for Hereford genetics will continue to grow and an increased number of Hereford-influenced cattle will be available in the marketplace.

### What advice do you have for a commercial cattleman looking to add value to his cows?

The Hereford breed has a lot to offer. The amount of performance increase in the calves produced and the advantages of the Hereford-influenced female will be very apparent once Hereford genetics are introduced. I am confident that the AHA will continue to gain market share in the commercial industry as more tools are provided and additional research is performed to prove the value of Hereford genetics in an operation. All of this, along with the continued growth of CHB will allow a producer with a commercial cow herd using Hereford bulls to potentially see a noticeable increase in the value of their cattle. **HW**