Inside...

| Technology Section |

Udder Quality EPDs ... 30

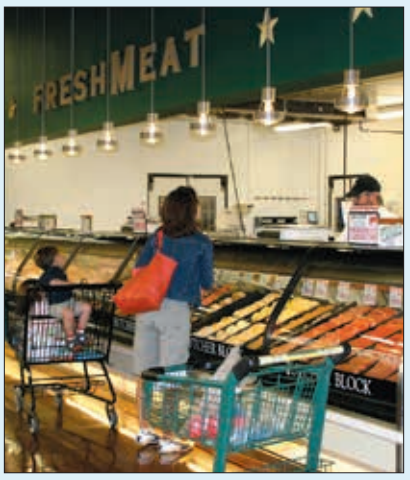
Sexed Semen 34

MyHerd.org 40

EPD Accuracy 48

Herd Improvement 52

Mobile Apps 56



Soothing Consumer Concerns 72

Genetic Summit — Continuing the Conversation:

Fine-tuned Heterosis .. 76

Hereford Champions Selected in Reno 96

HEREFORD WORLD

Published by the American Hereford Association

February 2015; Vol. 105, No. 9

No Profit in Excuses

Hereford breeders are making the commitment to improve genetics through the use of GE-EPDs.

by ***Sara Gugelmeyer***

"The more information we have, the better decisions we can make," says Doug Gerber of Gerber Land & Cattle in Indiana. "I am making the commitment to DNA profile all females and all our sale bulls to gain the information GE-EPDs (genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences) provide. Did you ever meet anyone that in their heart wanted to be average? So, in order to not be average, we have to do things that are above and beyond and make a commitment to it and spend a lifetime at it."

The American Hereford Association was the first breed organization to adopt this new technology in 2013. GE-EPDs are calculated by blending DNA information with conventional EPDs for enhanced accuracy.

Gerber puts his philosophy into layman's terms to help his customers understand the value of this technology. "If you study on this, a DNA profile on a virgin bull gives us what his 10 to 12 first progeny may be. So we've got a year's production out of a bull before he's even bred a cow. Or you could know a cow's productive history before she even has a calf."

Getting everyone on board

Brock Nichols of Carswell-Nichols Herefords, Alton, Kan., is using the technology as well. His family has been in the Hereford business for 86 years, and as the youngest generation returning to the operation, he makes sure they stay abreast of the latest advancements.

"We use a lot of ET (embryo transfer); and we try to do as much testing as we can to improve accuracy and improve the product for our customers," Nichols says. "My grandfather is still around and I've went back and forth with him over the years about implementing new technology. But as soon as older generations see it and what it's doing for our programs, they do come around, it just takes them a little bit longer. When something's worked for so many years the way they did it, it can be hard to change. But when they see it in action I think they change their minds pretty quick."

These new technologies include collecting DNA and utilizing GE-EPDs since the technology became available. Last year Carswell-Nichols Herefords tested 60 head prior to the operation's January sale. This year Nichols says he tested 82 head before the 2015 sale.

"Most of our customers are commercial cattlemen," Nichols says. "I explain GE-EPDs, and I feel like our customers appreciate the effort to improve the product they're getting. I do get phone calls about our cattle just based on the fact that we have done all the genetic testing."

As a retired academic professional, Art Linton of Linton Polled Herefords, Miller, Neb., may have been quicker than some older Hereford breeders to accept this new technology. Still, as far back as 2012 he saw the advantages to DNA testing.

"One of the first tests we did was the horned/polled test," Linton explains. "We breed polled cattle now but had horned cattle originally. In terms of marketing some bulls to purebred breeders, we felt it was

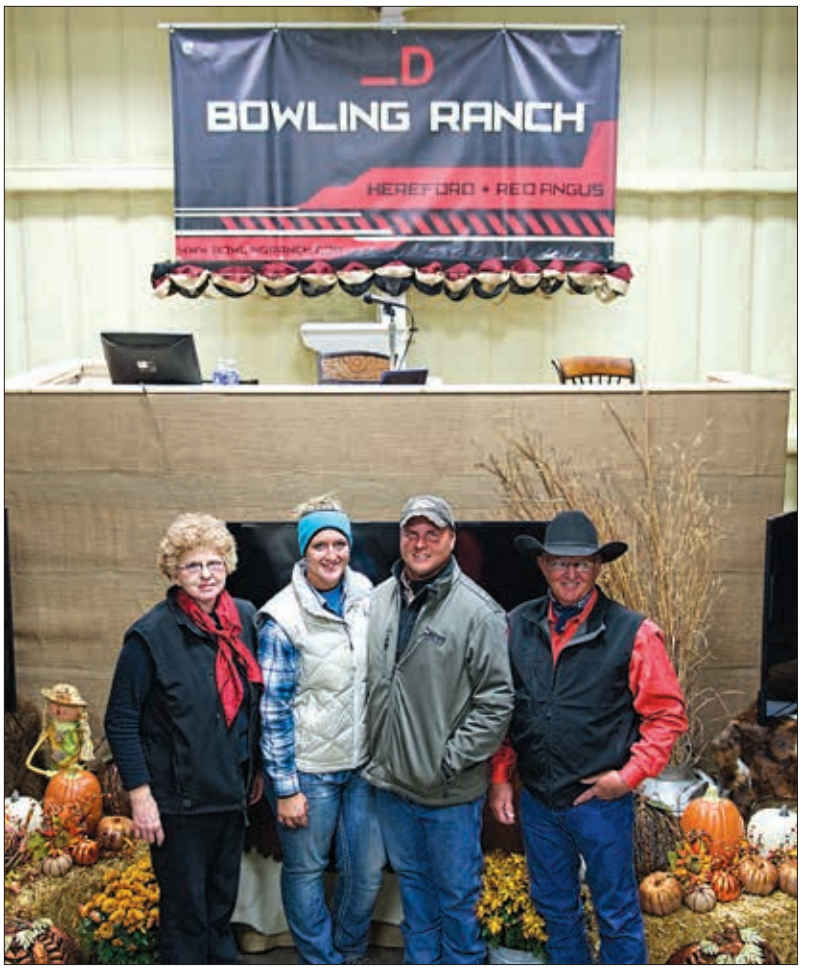
continued on page 22...

PHOTO COURTESY OF CARSWELL-NICHOLS HEREFORDS

...No Profit in Excuses continued from the cover

PHOTO BY HEIDI ANDERSON, COURTESY OF BOWLING HEREFORDS

Bowling Ranch is committed to improvement as it re-enters the seedstock business by selling bulls like this.



The first Bowling Hereford Ranch sale was a success. Pictured (l to r) is Nancy Bowling, Jill, Kris and Melvin Young.

important to know whether or not the bulls we were offering were homozygous polled or not."

Since the full DNA profile test has become available, though, Linton has tested a select group of bulls with the greatest potential to be sold as purebred herd sires or to be used in his own program.

Marketing advantages

Co-managers of Bowling Hereford Ranch in Oklahoma, Nancy Bowling and Melvin Young, first started GE-EPD testing as a marketing tool, but the value in it has led them to continue testing more animals.

The late Dan Bowling, Nancy's husband, sold many bulls up until the '80s, when it transitioned into a commercial operation. In 2005, though, after a very successful listing of purebred commercial Hereford heifers on HerfNet, and the hiring of Young in 2006, Dan and Nancy made the decision to get back into the seedstock business at first just to raise their own bulls for the commercial herd. Since then, Bowling Hereford Ranch has been purchasing Hereford genetics to improve the herd and although Dan passed away in 2012, the first production sale was hosted in November 2014. GE-EPDs were a big part of that sale.

"Since we were doing our first sale, I thought we would benefit from that added information," Bowling explains. "And I thought it also would help people believe that we were serious cattle people, interested in genetic data."

The sale, which featured some mature cows, bred heifers, fall and spring pairs in addition to bulls, was a success. Bowling says they'll continue to DNA test sale cattle for GE-EPDs and is considering doing more in the future.

Melvin's arrival at Bowlings' made them firm believers in EPDs and subsequently GE-EPDs, and Bowling says their motto is the old adage: "If it is not measured, it can't be improved."

She adds, "With genomic enhancement tools available, Hereford breeders can now have a third-party source of verification to definitively identify parentage. What better way to add integrity to a ranching operation than to exhibit the GE-EPD insignia?"

There's no question that when Hereford breeders look to purchase genetics to improve their operations, GE-EPDs are critical. All four breeders agree, when shopping for new bulls or females to add to their genetic base, it's important to them if the cattle have those numbers.

"I explain GE-EPDs, and I feel like our customers appreciate the effort to improve the product they're getting. I do get phone calls about our cattle just based on the fact that we have done all the genetic testing."

— Brock Nichols

PHOTO COURTESY OF CARSWELL-NICHOLS HEREFORDS

Carswell-Nichols Herefords has been in business for more than 80 years, but its lengthy Hereford history doesn't keep the management from being progressive and staying up to date on technology.

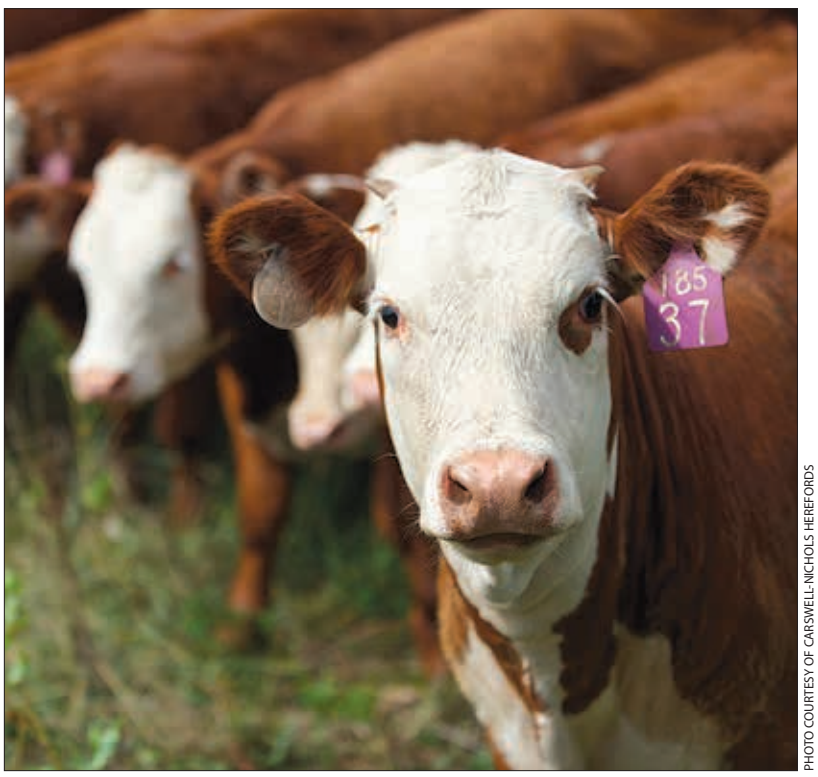


PHOTO COURTESY OF CARSWELL-NICHOLS HEREFORDS

Linton says, "As potential buyers of herd bulls, as we consider potential bulls for use in our program, we are also looking at whether or not the bulls had DNA tests run on them as well. We think it's important as a marketer and as a buyer."

Nichols agrees, saying, "When I look through a sale catalog, when we are looking for a new herd sire, I do lean more toward the cattle that have that GE-EPD done to them. It's not my final decision, but it sure does help. I can trust the data more when using the actual data that the calf produced itself."

If nothing else, it comes down to the breeder's commitment to being progressive.

"I think customers look toward the most progressive suppliers. I know I do," Gerber says. "When you go to buy a product, no matter what it is, you look for the most progressive and want the latest proven technology that you can buy with your dollar. If your customer base is to grow, you have to share with them all that you know and be on the forefront and be knowledgeable about all these things."

Improving the cow herd

Although right now, Bowling Ranch has only DNA tested the bulls and donor cows, Bowling says she may start doing the females as well.

"We are trying to improve the quality of our herd. Just because a calf comes out of a registered cow and bull, doesn't mean we will keep that animal in our registered herd. If she doesn't match up, her EPDs aren't good, or she's not a good producer, she will go to the commercial herd. Really, you need to know that data before you decide to even keep them. I can see where that would be advantageous. My goal is to become a better marketer and this is another tool to prove our cattle are better," she says.

Gerber certainly plans on using the added information from GE-EPDs to improve his cow herd. "What I want to do is sort toward the ones that cover the most traits," he explains. "Choose those that offer the most and do my best to propagate those cattle."

Although, the new reduced rate for a full DNA profile is only $55, Gerber was paying the higher cost before because he feels there is so much value in it.

"It's part of the research expense that goes into making a purebred operation a leader," Gerber says. "And you'll only become a leader if you make the right decisions with all the data. You could have all the data, never look at it, never do anything with it and remain the same. At some point in time you need to draw a line somewhere and that's a hard thing to do. You have to be disciplined in deciding where to draw the line, then work with the cattle that fall into the parameters that you've established in the direction you want to go."

Nichols, too, feels the cost is justified. "I feel like it paid for itself," he says. "We probably wouldn't have done it again, if it hadn't. It probably justified itself just with an increase in customers."

The cost reduction is encouraging him to do more cattle, though. "With the cost cut, I am planning to do all my replacement heifers I am putting back in my program and start doing my herd that way. Eventually I'd like to have my whole herd done. That way, I have more accurate data. I feel like maybe I can cull more cows then, because I'll have more information. With a little more data I can cull some that aren't doing as well as I think they are doing."

Breeders' responsibility

Both Nichols and Gerber agree it's also part of each seedstock producer's responsibility to the breed to collect this data.

"I want to do the best I can identifying superior genetics in this herd," Gerber says. "But it's also part of our responsibility to contribute to the genetic base of our breed Association. It takes time and effort, it's a financial obstacle to overcome too, but it's part of education and research. So, in order for us to do the best we can we need to know all that we can about our cattle. The Association has provided a wonderful opportunity for us to do that."

Nichols goes so far as to say maybe it ought to be mandatory.

"I feel like maybe it needs to be a part of the Hereford breed. I think it would help everybody's program if they did it. We'd get a lot more accurate numbers clear through the breed," he says.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GERBER LAND & CATTLE

Doug Gerber has made a commitment to improving his genetics through testing all he can.

"I'm seizing this opportunity to know all I can about these cattle, contributing to the database and working toward making Herefords all that they can be."

— Doug Gerber

Gerber says, "I'm seizing this opportunity to know all I can about these cattle, contributing to the database and working toward making Herefords all that they can be."

That's saying something, considering Gerber also sells Angus and SimAngus bulls, although his cousin now raises the SimAngus. "My dream is for people to walk into the bull pen and see a bunch of really good Angus bulls, and some really good SimAngus bulls, and good Hereford bulls. I want them to look at them, and say 'Wow I came here to buy a black bull, but these Herefords are so good. They cover all the bases, they've got low birth weights, accelerated growth, they are structurally correct, eye appealing, they've got ribeye area, they've got marbling and the bulls have big testicles. These are so good this is what I want.'"

"I don't know why, as Hereford breeders, we can't do that. We've got the tools."

About 35 years ago animal science professor and longtime Hereford enthusiast Dave Hawkins left a big impression when he told Gerber, "There's no profit in excuses."

Gerber says he's taken that to heart and feels all Hereford breeders should remember that. "We can't raise Hereford cattle in today's age and be lax," he says. "We can make them marble, we can make them have big ribeye areas, we can make them grow, we can work on efficiency and calving ease. We can accomplish all those things if we just dedicate ourselves to it. We've now got the best tools to do it." **HW**

"As potential buyers of herd bulls, as we consider potential bulls for use in our program, we are also looking at whether or not the bulls had DNA tests run on them as well. We think it's important as a marketer and as a buyer."

— Art Linton

PHOTO COURTESY OF LINTON HEREFORDS

Linton Polled Herefords in Miller, Neb., is GE-EPD testing its top sale bulls.