



Influencing the Industry

Hereford genetics continue to bring profitability to the commercial producer.

The value of Hereford crossbreeding continues to be discussed around the industry, for good reason. Producers are pulling out all stops on those things that can add dollars and drive down cost. Uncertainty in the political landscape of the nation has undoubtedly threatened and ultimately stymied small business while banks are clinching cash, preventing entrepreneurs from doing what they do best and that's grow business.

Consequently, the nation's job losses have contributed to slowed beef demand, and this, along with high inputs, has contributed to a reduction in the nation's cow herd and strained profitability in the beef industry.

Many of the packers have gone to a 36-hour workweek, processing only five days compared to six days a week when beef demand was at its peak. Consumers are under a cash crunch and many have curbed their

spending, taking on a "save-for-a-rainy-day-fund mentality."

Our grandparents' generation that survived "the Great Depression" preached the "live-within-your-means lifestyle." That generation tended to accumulate a great deal of wealth through hard work and good money management. There were a lot of ranches paid for under that strategy, so some of this may prove to be beneficial in the end.

But how do we become more efficient as an industry so that we can survive and thrive in this type of economic environment? The American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors has been contemplating that question for some time. As a breed, what does Hereford deliver to the commercial sector that can keep commercial customers in business? What can the breed do to improve the genetic base even further?

For several years now, the AHA Board and staff have worked diligently to demonstrate the value of the Hereford breed in effecting profitability in the commercial beef industry through the simple science of heterosis. Projects such as the Harris Ranch/Lacey Livestock project in California and the Circle A heterosis project in Missouri are two high profile real-world field trials that have demonstrated what smart crossbreeding of two maternal breeds can bring to the industry table in the form of higher pregnancy rates that drive more efficiency.

Industry thought leaders and scientists from across the country are beginning to stress to producers the necessary and economically relevant use of breeds in crossbreeding systems to assure profitability on the ranch. Jack Whittier, Colorado State University beef cattle specialist, recently reminded producers at the 21st annual Range Beef Cow Symposium in Casper, Wyo., that fertility and pregnancy rates are the paycheck that lays the foundation for profitability for cow-calf producers.

Whittier made comparisons to 40 years ago and confirmed that, just like back then, nutrition, genetics and management each play a role in pregnancy and calving rates with nutrition being the biggest cost factor in the equation. To reduce costs and assure higher and more profitable pregnancy levels, he encouraged the use of crossbreeding and stressed that, "Not incorporating breed complementarity and heterosis is not an option."

Choice of genetics and proper breed use, for all intent and purpose,

are probably the cheapest things a cow-calf producer can do to assure higher levels of fertility, pregnancy rates, calving rates and calf survivability.

The AHA breed improvement committee is currently working on strategies that will continue to improve the Hereford breed to make it even more invaluable to the commercial cow-calf producer. Below is a list of strategies that were mentioned at the most recent AHA membership meeting in Kansas City last October:

- Establish an expected progeny difference (EPD) for heifer calving rate that will begin to identify those sires whose daughters breed quickly and calve out a higher percentage of the time on their first try.
- Establish an EPD for cow longevity that will begin to identify those sires whose daughters last longer in the herd with a timely rebreed each year.
- Work with genetic companies or universities to conduct research in the area of feed efficiency in an effort to identify genetic tools that might find genetic differences in feed conversion within the Hereford breed.

The AHA has directed its focus on those objectives that have the most impact on the cow-calf operator's bottom line. These traits are lowly heritable and hard to measure; however, making slight improvements will benefit you, the producer, even more when you use Hereford genetics in your crossbreeding plans. **HW**

Member service committee formed

American Hereford Association (AHA) President Bob Harrell formed a new committee during the AHA Board meeting last fall. Paul "Butch" Funk was named chairman of the committee that will have a very diverse responsibility for the organization. A few of those responsibilities will be:

- Review and continually evaluate improvements in the Association's online registry system.
- Review and develop strategies with private company software providers that might make good partners in managing on-farm data and assisting with the transfer of data to and from the Association and breeders.
- Find ways to reduce costly postage and move more breeders to electronic information and storage.
- Maintain and monitor acceptable turn-around time and accuracy of record keeping.
- Address other service issues that affect the membership.

For comments or ideas, contact AHA Director Butch Funk at 254-289-7657. **HW**