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PHOTO BY JERRY GERECHTY

Herefords Pay

Feeder calf sales show Herefords are worth a premium.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

Feeder calf buyers are willing to pay a premium for quality, uniform, vaccinated, weaned groups of calves. After last fall one could add Hereford-influenced to that list of traits buyers are looking for. And it doesn't matter what region the sale is in. Prices proved it from three Hereford and Hereford-influenced feeder calf sales across the country where calves brought more than at other comparable sales in each area.

Why are Hereford and Hereford-cross calves selling for more than others at these sales, even outselling straight black cattle? It's simple, especially in these market conditions; buyers just don't want to take a chance on cattle that don't meet their criteria of health and quality. Plus, more and more cattlemen are realizing the value of Hereford's efficiency: Hereford-sired calves will gain more while eating less.

Each sale had its own individual requirements, but for all of them, calves had to be at least 50% Hereford, vaccinated with a standard protocol and weaned for at least 30 days. The cattle were also sorted into load lots by weight and kind.

Starting in Tennessee Oct. 26, at the 11th-annual Tennessee Hereford Marketing Program (THMP), 66 consignors sold 852 head of age-, source- and health-verified Hereford and

Hereford-cross calves for \$35 and \$57 per head more than the reported weekly average for steers and heifers respectively.

Sale coordinator John Woolfolk says, "For a more direct comparison, we used an organized sale for weaned and vaccinated cattle that were primarily black. THMP steers outsold comparable pens in that sale in three out of five weight breaks, and THMP heifers outsold their counterparts in four out of five weight breaks with THMP six-weight heifers bringing more than \$6 more per hundredweight (cwt.)."

The calves, which were Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) and Hereford Verified eligible, sold from six states — West Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Tennessee. The demand for CHB continues to drive sales of Hereford calves, as CHB-participating feedlots were volume buyers at the sale.

The Kentucky Hereford Association (KHA) hosted a sale the very next day, Oct. 27, with much the same result. This sale was only in its first year, but sellers earned premiums of more than \$8 per cwt. for steers and \$10 per cwt. for heifers. Those premiums were multiplied on 532 head sold at the Blue Grass Stockyards South, Stanford, Ky.

Kentucky Department of Agriculture Beef Cattle Marketing Specialist Tim

Dietrich says, "It's not that Hereford cattle in Kentucky have been inferior in quality; they just simply haven't been marketed in large enough numbers under a standard health program to attract the big buyers that target truckload lots."

The sale drew a large crowd — 250 people were fed a steak dinner that evening at the sale facility. But just as important was that the organizers drew the kind of buyers they were hoping for.

Kentucky Hereford breeder and sale coordinator Lowell Atwood says plans are in progress to make the Kentucky Certified Hereford Influenced Sale an annual event.

These types of results are not limited to Hereford cattle in the Southeast. On Nov. 16 nearly 1,200 head of Hereford and Hereford-influenced feeder calves sold at the first Montana Hereford Association (MHA) sponsored feeder calf sale at Three Forks. The calves sold at the MHA sale brought as much as \$6 per cwt. more than the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) average in Montana that week for that weight group.

The Hereford and Hereford-influenced steer calves exceeded the USDA compiled Montana average market report in six of seven weight breaks. Heifer calves matched or exceeded the USDA compiled Montana average market report in four of six weight breaks.

"The premise for our sale was to demonstrate that Hereford calves of good quality and in volume lots would sell equal to or even better than their (straight) black counterparts," says Jerry Gerechty, MHA board member and sale organizer. "I think the underlying theme of our sale has been met and even exceeded."

Buyers turned out at the Headwaters Livestock Auction barn to buy the calves, of which about 65% were age- and source-verified. The age- and source-verified calves earned the largest premiums, of up to \$25 per head.

The MHA plans to make the sale an annual event, and organizers are considering hosting a second sale in Miles City.

The bottom line is, if you're looking for a way to earn premium prices for your calves at marketing time, one option is clear: breed your black cows to a Hereford bull, capitalize on the advantages of crossbreeding and get a bigger check on sale day. **HW**