



Use the Tools Available to Make Breeding Decisions

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season, and as we begin a new year, I am sure many of you are starting to calve and make preparations for another breeding season.

The Hereford breed continues to see demand for good genetics, and commercial cattlemen continue to see the benefit of adding Hereford genetics as a source of hybrid vigor for various breeds including *Bos indicus* breeds of the South and black and red Angus throughout the U.S.

These developments are exciting, and yet pose a great challenge to seedstock Hereford breeders. So, what do commercial cattlemen need with Hereford genetics and what kinds of tools are available to help create the genetics needed? As part of the American Hereford Association's (AHA's) last strategic planning process, a survey was conducted among commercial cow-calf producers to see which traits were most important when incorporating Hereford genetics into these herds. Calving ease (CE) was the No. 1 trait of interest, and this economically relevant trait (ERT) is always important because cattlemen want fewer issues at calving in terms of time and labor and cow recovery. Next

is disposition, and this is due to the inherent advantage of disposition of Hereford cattle.

So, the tools available for breeders to make breeding decisions are more robust and readily available at their fingertips today than ever before. The entire Hereford database is available to anyone, and expected progeny difference (EPD) or \$ index sorts can be made at Hereford.org by clicking on the "EPD Search" tab.

Producers can sort by any trait of interest and then pull performance certificates that are up-to-date with the most current information available on an animal.

The AHA adopted a whole herd performance recording system in 2000, which is the system recommended by the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), which allowed the AHA to develop addition traits including mature cow weight (MCW), sustained cow fertility (SCF), heifer calving rate (HCR) and udder quality EPDs.

As the industry continues to add additional traits, it may make sense for breeders and their customers to adopt the use of the \$ indexes, which are multi-trait with relative weightings on each trait and an economic value

associated with each based off of current, past and potential markets. These \$ indexes are valuable because they look at both output and input costs.

Most recently, a genomic component has been added to the national cattle evaluation (NCE). The AHA has been incorporating genomic information for more than a year, and this incorporation has added more predictive power to the numbers and reduced the risk of selection and mating of young non-parent bulls.

As a seedstock producer, I would not use a young bull that has not been high density (HD) genotyped, and it would seem reasonable that as a seedstock producer, you would offer this technology to the buyers of your young bulls. It just reduces the risk of using younger bulls.

At all levels, an artificial insemination (AI) program should be utilized by both seedstock and commercial producers. With tight margins associated with the cattle business, the use of some highly proven bulls for ERTs should be employed.

In seedstock herds, AI should be utilized throughout. In the commercial herds, at a minimum it should be used in the heifer

programs, and there are more and more data that prove it should be utilized even in the commercial cows. Timed breeding protocols along with businesses that provide AI technicians allow for much more widespread AI use than ever before. This technology allows all cattlemen to be much more precise with breeding and gives them access to the genetics that can make a real difference.

I would challenge everyone to put some serious thought into this spring's breeding. As a seedstock producer, do not accept average. It is your job to produce the kind of genetics the commercial industry needs. Even if your buyers do not retain ownership in cattle throughout the feedlot stage, it is important to select cattle that have end product merit.

Someone will be buying those cattle, and if they do not perform, then it is ultimately a reflection of your breeding program. In addition, remember to keep CE, growth, disposition, fertility and all ERTs in mind when selecting bulls. The tools are available to make the right decisions; use them, endorse them and continue to make the Hereford breed a useful and viable part of the commercial industry. **HW**

American Hereford Association National Reference Sire Program

Responsibilities of Test Herd:

- Select from nominated bulls
- Contact bull owner for semen shipping instructions
- Breed 55-60 cows at a random mating across genotypes
- Breed 30 cows to one reference sire that has been tested in previous years (at the cost of the test herd, semen and shipping at a commercial rate)
- Provide complete data on National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) forms
- Breeding data: Cow ID, specific breed makeup (based on percent), age of cow at breeding time, date bred and sire used
- Birth data: Calf ID, date of birth, weight and calving ease score
- Weaning data: Calf ID, date weaned and weight
- Interim data: Calf ID, date, weight
- Carcass data: Calf ID, carcass weight, marbling score, fat thickness, ribeye area, internal fat and yield grade
- Test herd must provide at least 55% conception rate
- Test herd must retain ownership or partnership at 50% or greater on cattle until they have been harvested

Test Herd Cost:

- All costs will be covered by test herd
- Test herd will pay for the reference sire semen for the 30 cows, and shipping semen will be priced at a commercial rate, data collection will be paid by test herd on all cattle

Responsibilities of Bull Owner:

- Nominate bulls for test sire
- Nominate bulls to American Hereford Association (AHA) by **March 1, 2014**
- Furnish 60 straws of semen and pay shipping cost to test herds
- Pay fees as required

Bull Owner Cost:

- Semen and shipment of semen
- Pay the test herd fee per bull tested when semen is shipped — contact Jack Ward for details

Responsibilities of AHA:

- Receive data and report all data back to bull owner and to test herd

AHA Cost:

There will be no cost to the test herd or the bull owner for the data reporting done by the AHA

Benefits of Test Sires:

- Obtaining high accuracy carcass EPDs (expected progeny differences)
- Obtaining performance data compared to other sires tested in herd contemporaries
- Opportunity to market semen as a NRSP reference sire, after nominated and selected
- Opportunity to test sires next to the top Hereford genetics in the breed

2014 National Reference Sire Feedlot and Carcass Testing Program

Sire Nomination Form

Ranch Name _____ Contact person _____

Address _____

Phone No. _____ E-mail: _____

Test Bull Information: Name and Registration No. _____

Name and Registration No. _____

*I acknowledge that any information or samples I provide to the AHA or through AHA programs may be used by the AHA for any purpose. _____

Signature

Send application by **March 1, 2014** to:

American Hereford Association
Jack Ward
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816-842-3757 • jward@hereford.org