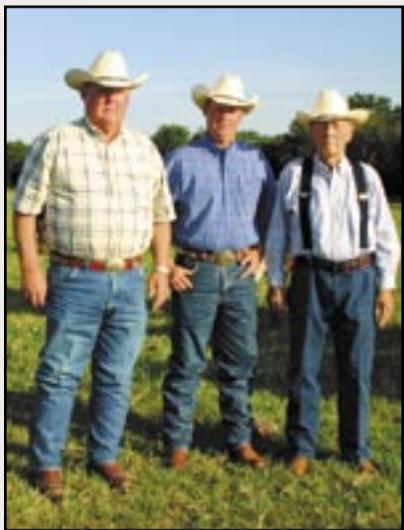


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soon after calving using a whole number system from 1-9. Explanation of the scores and example photos are included on page 6. An udder score reference chart is also printed in the *Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) User's Guide*.

The process

"It's important to understand that udder scores just look at udder quality and not milk production," explains Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement. "Do not concern yourself with the amount of milk a cow is producing; that will be recognized in calf weaning weights."

Hereford breeder Jim Bellis, Aurora, Mo., has been collecting udder scores for more than 15 years. The first year he took a picture of each cow's udder the day she calved. Then after calving season he sat down with his local Extension specialist and together they evaluated and scored the udders. This process helped Bellis develop a visual picture of what each score represented. "A cow with a tight, small-teated udder can raise just as good of a calf as a big-uddered cow," he says.

It's also important to note that udder score is independent of all other traits. Do not attempt to correlate udder scores with traits like cow size or calving ease.

The scoring system is based on teat size and udder suspension, which are the most significant characteristics of an udder and the easiest to evaluate.

"The best day to score is the day the cow or heifer calves, bar none," Marston says. Scores taken later in lactation can be misleading since udder problems are most prevalent when cows first freshen.

Udder scores can be reported to the AHA on Form 1 — Registration Application/Birth Information Worksheet. They can also be submitted

online or using HerdMASTER software.

Ward says it's important to realize that udder scoring is subjective and the in-herd difference is what matters. It's a good idea to have the same person score all udders so the

scores are consistent and comparable. This in-herd consistency will strengthen the data and as more data is collected it could possibly be used in future sire evaluations.

continued on page 6...

Scoring Momma

Don't forget to collect udder scores when taking birth weights, recording calving ease and tagging calves.

by Angie Stump Denton

Udder and teat quality are two functional characteristics of a cow that in many herds go unnoticed until problems arise. Just as seedstock producers put selection pressure on birth, weaning and yearling weights, the same concern and effort should be placed on udder quality.

"Take the time to observe, record and report," says Twig Marston,

Kansas State University Extension beef specialist. "At calving we now record birth date, birth weight, calving ease and administer ID. Why not take 30 seconds of time to make cows better?"

The American Hereford Association (AHA) recommends breeders score udders and teats on producing females



Udder Scoring **Q&A**

Q When is the best time to score udders?

A The best time to evaluate and score udders is within 24 hours after calving.

Q How do I report the information to the AHA?

A Producers can use Form 1 — Registration Application/Birth Information Worksheet — to submit udder scores, or they can be submitted online or using HerdMASTER software.

Q How often do I collect udder scores?

A It's important to score cows each year. Udder quality will usually decline with age; however, age should not be considered when evaluating the udders. This

practice will help determine which genetics produce udders that will hold up over time.

Q Udder scoring is subjective. What good will the scores be in sire evaluation?

A There may be scoring variation between herds. As long as scores within a herd are consistent the data may be used for future sire evaluation. If more than one person within a farm or ranch are doing the udder scoring, it is important that the scores are as comparable as possible.

Q How do udder scores relate to milk production?

A Udders should be scored without considering milk production. The scoring system is intended to evaluate udder soundness. Calf weaning weight is the best estimate of milk production.

The benefits

“Documenting udder scores can influence sire selection, improve profitability through herd management and culling, and be used as a marketing tool,” Marston says. “Udder size and teat placement have been associated with stayability or longevity, incidence of mastitis, calf nursing behavior, labor costs, and calf health.”

In the past, udder quality and milking ability were traits that needed some attention in the Hereford breed. Bellis says for almost 30 years he has been working to improve that reputation. “If we make progress in the amount of milk produced, we’ve also got to work on udder quality,” he says.

Ward agrees and adds, “Hereford breeders have worked on this very important economical trait. Commercial cattlemen are always concerned with udder quality and we want them to know Hereford breeders have made an effort to improve and continue to work to improve udders and milking ability.”

Bellis confirms that the practice of collecting udder scores has helped improve udder quality within his herd as well as his customers’ herds. He says that Hereford breeders need to take time to evaluate udders and make management decisions so they can be proud of their cows’ udders and the udders on the daughters of the bulls they sell to customers.

Udder scores can be used for cow culling as well as replacement heifer, sire and donor dam selection. Seedstock breeders should establish minimum scoring standards and cull all cows not meeting those expectations. Producers can utilize udder score records in replacement heifer selection by considering a heifer’s dam and maternal half sibs’ udder quality. This practice can help assure the udder soundness of their future cow herd.

Bob Goble, Ridgeview Farm, Alto, Mich., has been recording udder scores for five years. “We use the scores to trace cow families and sire groups

Udder score reference chart

It is recommended that breeders score udders and teats on producing females in their herd soon after calving. The AHA uses a whole number system from 1-9 as in the examples below.



9 An ideal mammary system. Udder is held high up near the rear and is level in front. Teats small.



8 Very good udder with level attachment in front and high attachment in the rear with desirable teats.



7 A sound and functional udder that is fairly level with small, good teats.



6 A very functional udder and teats. Problem-free, but will not have the balance of an udder scored 7, 8 or 9.



5 A functional udder and teats, labor free. Udder and teat scores of 5 or better should be “labor free.”



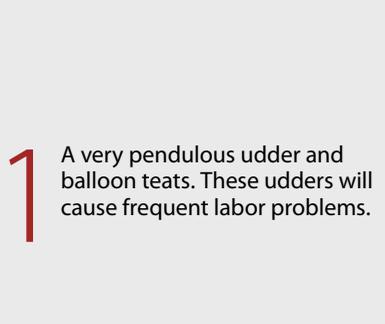
4 An udder that could become a problem because of attachments and/or shape and size of teats.



3 A problem udder and teats. The udder will show tendencies of breaking down, and teats are too large and balloon shaped.



2 A definite problem udder and teats. The udder is poorly attached in the front and back with weak suspension, and teats are large and balloon shaped.



1 A very pendulous udder and balloon teats. These udders will cause frequent labor problems.

It's important to realize that udder scoring is subjective and the in-herd difference is what matters. It's a good idea to have the same person score all udders so the scores are consistent and comparable.

to make more predictable matings,” Goble says.

As suggested, Goble scores a cow each year to track udder soundness throughout her lifetime. “Cow longevity is important to making a profit,” he says. “Next to breeding ability, udder longevity and production would be next in line.”

Stacy Sanders, AHA director of records department, says when the AHA started Whole Herd TPR in 2001 the number of udder scores reported increased 5-10% that year and has been gradually climbing ever since, see Table 2.

Ward says his goal is to capture udder scores on all Hereford females. So as you collect data on those new calves this spring, don't forget Momma. **HW**

Table 2: Number of udder scores reported to the AHA.

Year	Herds ¹	Dams
2000	1,731	20,620
2001	1,781	27,365
2002	1,837	30,959
2003	1,821	30,957
2004	1,912	33,187
2005	1,943	35,253
2006 ²	1,402	24,278

¹Reported at least one udder score during the year.

²In 2006 cow herd inventories reported was down 4,260. This drop can be attributed to the drought conditions of 2005-06.

The beef cow mammary system

The mammary system is one of the most important functional traits of the cow. Anyone who has ever attempted to milk out a sore-bagged, balloon-teated cow can certainly relate to the call for quality udders.

Udder and teat soundness are a concern for a number of reasons. A few being: 1) labor associated with extra costs and reduced convenience; 2) longevity, which may be reduced because of injury or mastitis; 3) calf performance, affected by reduction in milk flow or lower colostrum intake by newborn calves having difficulty nursing oversized teats; and 4) heritability of udder and teat characteristics. There definitely is variation in udder quality of daughters from different sire groups. Thus, change can be made through selection.

Characteristics

It is critical that you be able to recognize the desirable, as well as the faulty, udder.

An ideal udder is snugly attached, symmetrical and of moderate length. The quarters should be evenly balanced, with the teats of medium size and length.

The teats should be placed squarely under each quarter. A side view of the udder should show a level udder floor without any quartering.

The median suspensory ligament is the center support that ties the udder to the cow's body wall. This is the indentation



Ideal udder

or cleft you see when you view a cow's udder from the rear. A strong median suspensory ligament is essential to a satisfactory mammary system.

A cow that doesn't have a strong center support is subject to several serious udder problems: 1) the udder floor may drop and cause the udder attachments to weaken; 2) once the udder floor has dropped, the teats will begin to strut outward on the sides of the udder making them much more liable to be injured; and 3) once the udder floor has dropped, the entire mammary system may deepen to the point where the cow's calf can't nurse.

The foreudder should be of moderate length and strongly attached, with teats of moderate size and length.

A foreudder that's too long may break away from the body wall as the cow gets older. Also, extra long foreudders are frequently "meaty," an indication of low production.

The rear udder should be attached high to the body, with moderate width. It needs to show the defined halving described for the median suspensory ligament.

Quality and texture of a cow's udder are also important items for you to consider. Ideal texture can best be described as a sponge-like consistency that allows a cow to let down her milk rapidly once she's stimulated. Ideal quality means that her udder is soft and pliable, free from congestion and hardness.

— **Ron Torell**, University of Nevada, and **Robert Pawelek**, Oregon State University