



Bill, Bobbi, Walker and Reagan Dunn.

# Herefords: The Efficient Option

*For commercial producer Bill Dunn and his family, Hereford is the breed of choice because of lower management costs.*

by Angie Stump Denton

If a cow can't survive on a round bale of hay and minerals, they've got to go, says Bill Dunn, Cochran, Pa. "I can't afford the time and investment to make corn silage and corn. Especially today with rising input costs — it's not just fuel and feed, we're also experiencing increases in labor and taxes — we've got to have as efficient cattle as possible."

According to Bill, Herefords are the best option to meet his management needs. "Our straight Herefords and baldies are as efficient as they come," he says. "Hereford cattle are more efficient. It is a fact. With today's economy Hereford breeders should see an increased demand."

For Bill and his wife, Bobbi, the cattle are their passion, but

a majority of their time and resources are devoted to the family's asphalt/paving company. Bill works with his dad and uncle to manage the business that does contract work for the state of Pennsylvania. The company owns a sand and gravel plant and an asphalt plant and has a crew of 45. Bill is responsible for the mix design work and



The Duns develop about 25-35 heifers a year. Selling replacement females is not a priority for the Duns, but they have experienced an increase in demand for Hereford-influenced heifers in recent years and have sold small groups of females as numbers and price permit.

the paving crew. For Bill the company is more than a full-time job from April to October.

With the asphalt business, the Duns explain, their cattle operation has to be a low-labor outfit that can thrive with little management. "We don't pamper our cows," Bill says. "We've got to have cattle that will work for us."

## Why Herefords?

Bill explains efficiency is not the only reason he prefers Herefords. "Herefords are the only ones you can tell what they are today," he says. "It is the only true breed left."

Bill says he believes Hereford bulls are more aggressive. "Turn out a Hereford bull and an Angus bull with a group of cows, you'll get more Hereford calves," he says.

Another Hereford advantage is temperament. Bill explains how a potential customer said his No. 1 requirement was that the cattle be quiet and gentle. The customer walked through the Dunn's heifers, Bill quoted him a price and he took them. Herefords sell themselves with their docility, he says.

## The Dunn herd

"I'd like to think our commercial cow herd is one that rivals most seedstock operations in pounds per calf weaned on forage," Bill says.

Their herd consists of 225 cows — 65 black baldies, 30 red baldies and the remainder is commercial Herefords. Their bull battery includes 10 Hereford and six Angus bulls. The cow herd is managed in groups of 40, so when selecting bulls, Bill prefers to buy 2-year-olds.

When he started managing the cow herd in 1989 after graduating from college, Bill explains, the herd was just a common group of cows. But in three years, Bill increased weaning weights by 80 lb. He attributes the increase to genetic selection, "using good Hereford bulls."

"Through bull selection, we can produce calves that are big, heavy, dependable and that people want," Bill says.

To achieve those goals, Bill utilizes performance data when evaluating potential sires. "Integrity in data is very important to us," Bill says. "We need a live calf from every cow; we don't have the luxury of having train wrecks."

Denny Stockdale, Stockdale Farms, Dayton, Pa., says, "Bill looks down the road at the end product, not just as steers but also females. He's not scared to spend a little extra money to get quality."

Stockdale described the Dunn herd as moderate-type cows with milk and do-ability bred into them. "His cows have a natural ability to perform with little inputs."

## Through the years

Herefords have been a part of the Dunn family's operation since 1945, when Bill's grandfather brought the first trainload of

Herefords to Cochran. In 1976 Bill received his first purebred cow as a Christmas gift, and after graduating from college in 1989, he returned home to help with the operation full-time.

The Dunn family was involved in the dairy business for 100 years. They sold the dairy cows in 1999, a move that allowed them to focus more on the beef business.

Today the Dunns concentrate on the cow-calf operation and hay production. Their hay production averages about 2,600 round bales per year. So that they don't have to worry about the weather, they bale the hay, even when it is wet, and then wrap the bales in bags. "We grind the hay in the chopper and the cows think it is like candy," Bill says.

#### Quick to adapt new technology

Bill says his grandfather was an innovator. "Before anyone talked about heterosis, he used Charolais bulls on Hereford cows and topped the sale each year at the sale barn," he says.

Bill is a lot like his grandfather. He's not hesitant to try new things, if they will improve his management or marketing. The last three years the Dunns have used EID (electronic identification). They collect DNA on all Hereford bulls and have the GeneStar analysis done. Bill says they do the DNA test so they can tell potential buyers, "We have 'x' calves by 'x' number star tenderness bulls."

For the Dunns, data sell. They want to buy bulls with ultrasound data. "We want real data that we can then provide our buyers," Bill says.

The Dunns have been using artificial insemination (AI) for 10 years. They AI their heifers one cycle and then turn out a clean-up bull. Their heifer program is to AI Herefords to Herefords, Angus to Angus and then clean-

up with an Angus bull. "We hire a tech to do the AI work," Bill explains. "For us it makes more sense to pay someone who knows what he's doing and get better conception rates."

They are also doing some embryo transfer to help build a registered Hereford herd for the next Dunn generation. Bobbi explains they will use some of their replacement females as recipients. "Our first priority is to build our registered herd and raise females the kids can show and be competitive with," she says.

#### Marketing strategies

Dunn calves are weaned the first of October, backgrounded for 90 days and then sold around Christmas. In the '70s the Dunns fed out their own calves. The finishing facility is now used to background the weaned calves.

For the last seven years, Bill and Bobbi have listed the calves on *HerfNet.com*. HerfNet is a free online advertising tool for producers to market their feeder calves and commercial females.

"Bill Dunn is one of the most progressive commercial cattlemen in my nine-state territory," says John Meents, American Hereford Association fieldman. "Bill works extremely hard in developing new and better markets for his calves."

Bill was a member of the committee that organized the first Greater Midwest Certified Hereford Feeder Calf Sale Dec. 6 in Carthage, Ill. The Dunns consigned a group of calves to the sale and were excited about the sale's success.

"It was a tremendous success," Bill says. "It proves when you offer groups of cattle that are sorted to be like-type with a health program, you can earn premiums. We'll definitely be sending a group to the sale next year."

Bobbi adds that she's never seen Bill as excited as he was when



Herefords and Hereford-influenced cattle have been a part of the Dunn cow herd since 1945. With the next generation interested in Herefords, the legacy will continue for years to come.

**Below:** Walker Dunn is looking forward to his years in the showing as a Hereford junior.



PHOTO BY SARA GUGELMEYER

he came home from the feeder calf sale. "It's a great thing for the Hereford industry to have a sale like that," she says.

Another marketing niche is selling freezer beef to local families. The family finishes about 15 steers each year to market.

With the females, Bill and Bobbi keep about 25-35 per year. The past five years they've seen an increase in demand for Hereford

and Hereford-influenced replacement females and have sold small groups of females when the price is right.

#### The future

Bill and Bobbi have two children — Walker, 7, and Reagan, 3. The last few years the family has started purchasing a few registered Herefords to show and start building a registered herd.

Bobbi showed horses and cattle growing up. "We want the same experience for our kids," she says. "To experience agriculture and the showing."

Along with building a small registered herd for the kids, Bill says he hopes to increase hay production to then be able to grow the cow herd and be able to sell more bred replacement females and continue to sell two loads of calves each year.

With Walker and Reagan beginning their careers in the Hereford business, the WD brand will be seen for many years to come in the Hereford industry. "We've been here a while and hope to stay here a while longer," Bill says. **HW**



For a cow to become part of the Dunn herd, she has to be functional with a big middle, clean-fronted and free-moving and have good numbers. Bill says performance data is a tool he uses when selecting females and bulls for his breeding program.