

Hereford Longevity

The Hereford Role in Heterosis

Commercial cattlemen have been looking for a bull with stayability for years — the Hereford bull just may be the answer.

by *Tosha Powell*

Cattle producers know the best way to increase income is to reduce costs. Purchasing a high-quality bull with genetics that are complementary to your herd every year or two defeats the purpose. The good news is that Hereford bulls may have the longevity a producer needs to remain in the black.

“When people shop for a herd bull, you have to know what constraints your environment holds,” says Matt Spangler, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension beef genetics specialist. “You must have cattle that can survive in your environment.”

For commercial cattle producers with predominantly Angus cows, crossbreeding gives not only heterosis but combines the individual breeds into a calf crop that brings top dollar in the market place.

“You have to look for a bull that complements your cow herd,” Spangler says. “If mated to a different breed of cows, Hereford bulls can produce calves that benefit from heterosis. If producers are retaining their own replacements they should realize that crossbred females can generate up to \$100 more per year than their purebred contemporaries.

“Traditionally, Hereford cattle are known as a rugged, low-input breed,” he continues. Taking the strengths from each breed and combining them into one calf crop can give a herd the total package a buyer is looking for at the sale barn.

Ron Thomson and his brother, Don, manage a commercial herd near Tarkio, Mo.

“We backgrounded steers on our own grass until eight or nine years ago,” Thomson says. “But with source and genetic verification practices, we thought it would be a good idea to change our operation and manage our own cow herd.”



PHOTO BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON

Although the Thomsons chose to manage Angus cows for their operation, it was Hereford bulls that they found to complete the whole package.

“Hereford bulls go out and do their job and that’s exactly what we were looking for,” Ron says. “We don’t pamper our bulls a lot, so when they come in here already in good shape and ready to go out and work, we don’t complain.”

Crossbreeding is becoming a natural trend in the cattle industry. Thomson says he finds that calves from a Hereford-Angus cross have more natural growth and always give a few more pounds at the sale barn.

“Sure we want good genetics,” Thomson says. “But what we really want is the whole package that a horned Hereford bull can give to make a good crossbred calf.”

For any commercial cattleman, it’s important to find the right makeup in a bull to complete his herd. But of course, cost is on every cattleman’s mind.

Spangler says, “How often do you want to have to replace a sire? There is nothing wrong with spending more money on a bull if he meets your breeding objective and is able to stay in the herd for more years than the average bull.”

Thomson says he chose Hereford bulls not only because of

the genetic component but because of the ability to save money with Herefords’ natural longevity traits.

“Our last set of bulls we worked for five breeding seasons,” he says. “We run about 19 cows per bull and was able to keep them around for five years. It’s nice to know that we can work them like that and that the Hereford bulls were still in good enough shape to bring enough money to help replace them at the sale barn.”

Oftentimes when we talk about longevity, we talk about structural soundness, Spangler says. A bull that can’t stay in the herd because he’s not structurally sound can produce daughters with the same structural deficiencies.

Nebraska Sandhills cattleman Arlan Paxton says his commercial Angus operation uses Hereford bulls to take advantage of the hybrid vigor bred in the black baldie calves. Paxton uses Hereford bulls to take the edge off the Angus’ disposition and put longevity back in the cow herd.

“I like Angus-Hereford cross to maintain hybrid vigor,” Paxton says. “I also like that I can keep an English cow base.”

Before Paxton purchases a new bull for his herd, he says, he wants the bull to look and act the part.

“In order for me to buy a bull, he has to look the part:

structurally sound, fertile and be able to demonstrate he’s efficient enough to get my herd where I want it.”

Like Thomson, Paxton sees longevity in the Hereford bulls he purchases.

“I can keep the Hereford bulls longer than the Angus bulls we run,” Paxton says. “We can keep the Herefords for at least six breeding seasons vs. four with Angus bulls.”

Some producers say that other bull breeds have the tendency to “fall in love” too easily with the cows in the pasture. Where the Angus bull breeds the same cow 10 times, a Hereford can breed 10 different cows, Paxton says.

Hereford cattle have proven to be more docile and not as aggressive as other breeds. Paxton finds that the Angus bulls in his operation fight with each other more than the Herefords do; therefore, the Herefords are able to stay in the herd longer.

Hereford bulls are the choice of commercial producers who are seeking an economic advantage. Herefords’ genetics provide soundness, fertility, efficiency and longevity — all things that help producers make and save money. **HW**