



PHOTO BY SARA GUGELMEYER

Producing Quality

Pennsylvania commercial producer says using Herefords in his program is the perfect fit.

by Angie Stump Denton



Rick Fabin's goal is to produce annual calf crops that are 100% baldies. He artificially inseminated all of his black cows to a Hereford bull in 2008 and then used a Hereford bull for clean up.

Rick says he enjoys Hereford cattle and the qualities they bring to his breeding program. He commends the Hereford Association for producing the "Power of Black... Only Better" ad campaign. "It is one of the best breed advertisements in my opinion that I have seen," he says. "It conveys the message that no matter how good your black cows are you can make your calves and future replacements better by using Herefords. What better way to increase the popularity of Herefords than to appeal to the commercial producer and show him the value that can be gained?"



If you are a commercial producer with a black cow herd, the best way to get a big payback is to use Hereford bulls says commercial cattleman Rick Fabin, Indiana, Pa.

"Put a whiteface on your calves and see how good they do for you," Rick explains. "The value of heterosis and the benefits of crossbreeding is real. Commercial producers can earn real value by using Hereford bulls on their black cow herds."

Rick farms in partnership with his brother, Stanley. The Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association named Fabin Bros. Farms its 2007 commercial cow-calf producer award winner.

Fabin Bros. is a diversified livestock and crop farm with 3,000 acres of rotational pastures, hay, corn, soybeans and wheat. The Fabin family spent years in the dairy business before dispersing the herd in the '80s. The family then started feeding cattle (purchasing stockers) before deciding about three years ago to start building a beef herd with the hope of better utilizing its land assets.

Rick explains they started putting their herd together three years ago. "We continue to progress and build a herd we are striving to have," he says. "At the time my son, Andy, was going to Penn State and his

interest is in cattle. Our hope is some day that he can come back home and we can start feeding cattle again. Our goal with the cow herd is to produce the type of cattle we would want to feed in our own lot."

Today the Fabins have grown their cow herd to include about 130 Hereford and Angus-based females. Rick says the 2009 calf crop will be 75% baldies, and his goal is to eventually be producing 100% baldies each year. "My goal is to produce a premier F1 — the Hereford-Angus baldie female," he says.

He says they focus on producing baldies because of their disposition, how they fit the environment and their quality on the "table."

Utilizing technology

The Fabin family is dedicated to improving efficiency and utilizing new technology to improve its operation.

"I want to be a progressive cattleman," Rick explains. "I want to have a program: produce cattle that fit a specific marketing target, not just turn out a group of cows to utilize grass."

For Rick this includes having a detailed health and management program as well as using artificial insemination and embryo transfer. He seeks out

the best genetics available and tries to take advantage of those genetics.

“Right now we are in a data collection mode,” Rick adds. “We want to try to collect data and make genetic choices based on the data.”

To track progress, Rick fed his 2007 calf crop in Kansas at Decatur County Feed Yard. He says the cattle performed adequately despite the fact that market conditions were not ideal. At press time he was considering sending his 2008 calf crop to Decatur. “We want to continue to see if we are moving in the right direction,” Rick adds.

Focusing on the female, the Fabins collect hip, pelvic and ultrasound measurements on all replacements to make sure they are retaining proper females. To continue to build a better herd, Rick culls the bottom 10-15% of his herd each year.

Rick says he tries to make intelligent, information-based decisions to achieve his breeding goals. To do this, he utilizes expected progeny differences (EPDs).

His sire selection focuses on maternal traits with the goal of producing an F1 baldie female with the best maternal characteristics possible. “I’m willing to give up some performance to get the maternal characteristics I’m striving for, but

I’ve found I don’t have to give up much, if any.”

Rick strives to develop moderate-framed females that are functional with good udders and feet. “You don’t need tremendous growth numbers. Calves with 1,300-1,400 yearling weights do not give you a 1,200 lb. cow,” he says.

The producers’ role

“As commercial producers, our job is to produce quality beef for the consumers,” Rick says.

He adds that he believes seedstock producers exist to work with commercial producers to meet consumer needs. “Purebred breeders need to be producing genetics that work for commercial producers who are feeding and producing cattle for the consumer.”

As a leader in the beef industry, Fabin serves on the Pennsylvania Hereford Association board, is a member and director of the Pennsylvania Cattlemen’s Association, and is a member of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.

Producing quality beef is job No. 1 at Fabin Bros., and Rick Fabin says Herefords help him achieve that goal. **HW**



In 2007 Rick purchased a group of Hereford replacement heifers.

The Hereford

Role in Heterosis



Herefords are the perfect fit if you’ve got black cows.

— Rick Fabin