

Changing Mindset to Meet the Demand

I've heard an "ol' timer" Hereford breeder say, "I was there during the good old days when Herefords were king, but today may be better."

Unquestionably, the demand for the Hereford breed has escalated at a pace that will soon become very difficult for the Hereford seedstock industry to meet in the coming years. This paradigm shift has come at a time when the industry has needed it most. Costs have certainly escalated on the average farm and ranch, and producers are looking for ways to enhance the productivity of their cow herd without driving up cost.

Maternal heterosis is an increasingly real and understood advantage from Hereford crossbreeding, and the inherent Hereford breed attributes such as easy disposition, fertility and longevity that were previously unheralded have suddenly become crucial to driving out cost and creating convenience and profit on the ranch.

This shift in the mindset of the commercial cattle producer to a greater appreciation for what this historic Hereford beef breed brings to the table must be accompanied by a shift in the mindset of the average Hereford breeder. This may come as quite a shock to some of our Hereford breeders out there, but the average Hereford breeder may have a bit of protectionism in his DNA.

Certainly there are explainable reasons that have conditioned longtime Hereford breeders to think this way, but as a rule Hereford breeders keep things pretty close to the vest

when it comes to communication, customer relations and customer contacts. For an industry that has faced trying times and competitive situations that took away market share, this mindset is understandable.

During the 1970s and 1980s, plenty of new breeds of cattle evolved into composite breeds that attacked the market share base of the Hereford breed. Naturally, producers believed every customer was a precious commodity because every customer mattered to the livelihood and survival of the family operation.

Today, the reality of the market place is changing. The Hereford breed has worked extremely hard over the last decade to make gigantic improvement in the quality of the average Hereford animal. The breed trends for birth weight, growth, milk production and, now, carcass traits have made remarkable progress. The adaptation of technology utilizing artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) through the use of proven genetics has created a value for elite seedstock not seen since the early 1980s, but this time with real-world economic purpose.

Therefore, I'm suggesting Hereford breeders must become more open-minded when it comes to customer development and marketing. We should not worry about whether or not one of our customers buys a bull from a neighboring Hereford breeder or, for that matter, neighboring breeder of another breed.

Science tells us crossbreeding is a reality that must be adopted, and



I'm sure there will be times when a commercial man may need to change where he's buying his Hereford genetics for the same reasons.

Today, the pie has gotten much bigger. Market share opportunity is as great as the individual breeder wants to make it. It will become increasingly important that you reach this vast and growing customer base through whatever means possible.

Why transfers are important

Currently most Hereford range bulls sold across the country are not transferred to their new owners. A transfer of ownership is simply a breeder reporting the new ownership of the animal to the buyer where it's recorded with the American Hereford Association (AHA).

The transfer of the animal costs the breeder only \$5 per animal. Some breeders today continue to document the transfer of every animal they sell with the AHA. They understand that by transferring the ownership of a bull, essential contact information for that customer reaches the AHA so that the AHA can communicate with that customer.

There are also those who refuse to transfer the ownership of their bulls to their customer. Breeders have stated several reasons for not transferring animals to new owners, but most of them are concerned with the commercial customer being exposed to other breeders.

Today, the customer base opportunity is growing rapidly. This expanding customer base makes transfer of ownership an important

part of AHA's overall marketing plan. Past AHA survey data have indicated that bull customers on the transfer list are 10 times more loyal to the breed than those who haven't used Hereford bulls. Undoubtedly, these cow-calf operators have an appreciation for Hereford genetics, but then they are also kept in the Hereford industry loop through direct communication.

Every commercial customer who purchases Hereford seedstock is precious to not only the breeder but also to the AHA. The AHA, its Board and its staff think enough of these customers that we want to reach out to them and provide information to them any chance we can get. Information comes in the form of a tabloid magazine, an e-newsletter or special mailings of upcoming events or sales.

In other words, we want them to feel as if they are a part of the Hereford business, and we want them to keep the image of the Hereford breed top-of-mind when they think of buying bulls. Touching our customers at least four to five times a year is critical to sustaining a marketing relationship with them. The AHA can deliver these touches as part of a breeder's extended promotional plan.

Secondly, we want to take every opportunity to provide information that might help commercial customers better market their calves. The Hereford-influenced female, whether she's straight Hereford, baldie or F1 tiger striped, has quickly become the most marketable maternal package in the country. The AHA can assist your commercial customer in adding value to packaged specification females and thereby adding another source of revenue for a commercial operation.

This can be accomplished through field service support or online auction services that will plug these packaged females into high demand markets. *BuyHereford.com*, the AHA's online auction service, has had more success in marketing commercial females than any other product line sold on the site in the last year.

Times have changed and will continue to change for the better for the Hereford breed and for Hereford breeders. It's time we have the confidence to open new market opportunities while making all Hereford customers feel welcome in what is becoming a very robust and vibrant marketplace for Hereford genetics. **HW**

Coley Joins AHA, Hereford World Staff as Field Rep

The American Hereford Association (AHA) and *Hereford World* (HW) staff are excited to announce Tommy Coley, Birmingham, Iowa, has joined the Hereford team. Coley will start Feb. 1 as the Eastern region field representative.

In this position, Coley will attend Hereford sales and events as well as assist breeders with marketing and genetic selection. He will also assist in educating members and commercial producers about AHA programs and other beef industry opportunities.

He will serve as the communication link between the AHA and breeders in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

"We feel very fortunate to hire someone with the depth of working knowledge of the Hereford breed that Tommy has," says Joe Rickabaugh, AHA director of field management and seedstock marketing. "Tommy will be moving back to Tennessee and is excited about the opportunity to work with breeders from the same area where he grew up."

Coley has been involved in the Hereford industry since birth and has been involved in the beef industry his entire career. He served as general manager of Perks Ranch, Rockford, Ill., for 12 years. Since 2005 he has operated Coley Cattle Co. and for two years he has served as a field representative for Keosauqua Sales Co., Keosauqua, Iowa. Coley judged the 2009 National Western Stock Show National Hereford Show.

"I'm excited to utilize my experience in marketing, promotions, cattle selection and people skills to serve the breeders in the Eastern region and help them make their Herefords the breed of choice for both commercial and registered breeders," Coley says.

Coley and his wife, Kim, have five children. **HW**

