

Perception Is Reality



Craig Huffhines

Undoubtedly the winds of change are occurring relative to the popularity of the Hereford breed in America. The change in the perception of the breed cannot at this time be measured by registered Hereford cow numbers on inventory or Hereford calf registrations as they have been virtually flat for the past five years. However, other indicators are evidence that the perception and demand equation for the breed is improving dramatically and might very well be attributed to the Association's strategic plan that has been in motion the past six years.

Taking a look at bull and heifer sale averages the past three years provides evidence enough, but what is really exciting for the breed is the trickle down effect that high production sale averages are having on private-treaty business for smaller breeders.

During the past two years, the breed has witnessed a run on private-treaty bull sales, and it has not been limited to the Midwest region of the country. Case in point: this past January, only 30 Hereford range bulls were entered in the historic Red Bluff Bull Sale in California. Typically, Red Bluff has attracted more than double that number of Hereford bulls, and they have historically sold very well. Less than half the number of consignments were entered this year

because of a demand issue. Many of the breeders who typically consigned cattle to the sale had already sold out of bulls through private-treaty arrangements and did not have bulls available to consign to Red Bluff.

The popularity of the breed can be witnessed on the show scene as well. The National Western Stock Show may not be the commercial bull-buying "mecca" of the past when W.T. Waggoner used to purchase Hereford bulls out of the Yards by truckloads; but, instead, it has become a seedstock showplace where breeders size up new genetics, partnerships are formed, major genetic acquisitions are negotiated and the new prospects trade hands, going back into the seedstock population.

It was hard to find a place to stand at ringside this year in Denver, as the entire coliseum was surrounded with onlookers to witness both the Hereford bull and heifer shows. Not all of those in the audience were Hereford breeders but were folks from other breeds interested in and commenting on the improvements in type the Hereford breed has made.

Dan Hoge, the Hereford judge at the Fort Worth Stock Show (FWSS) this year, said he had not been to the Hereford show in Denver, but had heard from several what an awesome exhibition of cattle it was. He also congratulated the FWSS exhibitors on the

depth of quality of the Hereford cattle shown. Probably the most telling statement Dan made to me personally was that the average of the Hereford breed exhibited in Fort Worth was exceptionally good and considerably better than the average of other breeds at this time. He was impressed in the strides the breed has made since he judged the Junior National Hereford Expo about 10 years ago.

At the FWSS not only was the Hereford open show the largest breed show, but the Hereford Cowtown Select Sale was the best it has ever been in its 41-year tenure. The high-selling registered Hereford pen of females brought more than \$4,000, and the commercial females sold substantially better than average. I also heard the junior heifer show the week prior had people filling the stands and standing six rows deep on the outer landing.

To top this off, a Hereford steer was named reserve grand champion, bringing \$200,000 through the youth premium auction. Jack Chastain, Texas Hereford Association secretary, said the packed crowd went wild when the heavy weight Hereford steer owned by Allie Henrie, Wolffoth, Texas, was slapped reserve champion amongst all those crossbred steers in the drive. Watch for complete FWSS results in the April *Hereford World*.

As I write this column, I received a call that the top seven graded bulls at the San Antonio Livestock Show

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All Breed Bull sale were Hereford bulls. All these things considered, I would say that the Hereford breed is thriving in the great state of Texas.

Changing the perception while improving the quality of Hereford genetics has been the mantra for our business the past 10 years. As part of the last strategic plan, the American Hereford Association (AHA) established programs that intensified breed improvement programs, commercial research projects to quantify the value of Hereford cattle in the commercial marketplace and

marketing alliances that have aided in the market movement of feeder cattle into the feedlot and packing sector.

These strategies were developed by Hereford breeders for Hereford breeders and the breed itself. All of you in the business who are continually working so hard to better the breed need congratulating. As a staff member and servant to you breeders, I thank you for your hard work, and I'm thrilled at the success we have been seeing!

In the coming weeks, the AHA Board will be working on an updated

strategic plan. You may be receiving electronic surveys as we evaluate our business and decide how to continue this momentous shift in breed perception. As we begin to make new plans to move the organization forward, I recall the statement by Gary Buchholz while he was judging in Denver, "What brought this breed to where we are today is we never forgot the beef industry. If we take care of the commercial sector along with taking care of new people entering our business, then everything else will take care of itself." **HW**