

Utilize AI to Make Genetic Improvement



Jack Ward

It's breeding season again and it's time to make those important decisions. Obviously it's imperative to set some goals each year, always keeping customers in mind when determining breeding strategies.

The most fundamental decision to make is whether to utilize artificial insemination (AI) or only use herd bulls. Either case is good and demands some selection pressure on traits,

but the possibilities for genetic improvement are unlimited with the use of AI.

In the past, management issues discouraged cattlemen from implementing AI. It took a lot of time, and costs prohibited breeders from pursuing bulls that could be used through AI. Some of this is still true, but let's take a look at how producers can benefit from utilizing this breeding tool.

First of all, AI allows producers to customize their herd. Every breeder has different aged cows and AI allows producers to separate younger females and breed

them to a proven low-birth-weight bull. This type of management decision should allow producers to make progress in changing genetic trends for different traits while resting easier during calving season with less calving problems.

By implementing an AI program, producers get the tools to prove herd bulls. This comparison strengthens the proof of a producer's herd and gives customers more security when buying genetics.

Also, incorporating AI can increase the value of

continued on page 106...

Non-Certificate AI Sire Program update

Nearly a year since it was started, the American Hereford Association's (AHA) Non-Certificate AI Sire Program has progressed as expected, says Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement. As new bulls enter the market this spring, Ward predicts there will be a large increase in the number of bulls enrolled.

The program allows breeders to nominate a bull into the artificial insemination (AI) program without selling AI certificates.

"The program began in April 2006 with the intent of increasing AI use within the breed by allowing breeders to register calves without the hassle or cost of AI certificates," Ward says. "The same rules apply to these bulls as do others from the standpoint of AI certification."

Producers who want to sell semen on a Hereford bull must first have the bull parentage verified through the AHA lab, Ward explains. Also, as of Dec. 1, 2006, every 250th calf born from AI

or embryo transfer must be parentage verified before registration papers are issued. This parentage verifying process is paid for by the AHA.

Approximately 16 bulls are currently enrolled in the Non-Certificate AI Sire Program, says Stacy Sanders, AHA records department director. Phil and Chris Rottman of Fremont, Mich., enrolled their bull, PCR 286 Mr. Advisor 502R, in the program last year.

"I think that it's important that good Hereford bulls be available to breeders at a lower price," says Phil. "I would recommend it to other breeders and I hope more of them will participate in it this year. It's a good opportunity for people to try other bulls at reasonable costs."

Bulls can be nominated into the program for \$250. The agreement must be signed by all bull owners and filed at the AHA. If a bull is syndicated then a representative of the syndicate must sign the agreement. Once a bull is registered into the program, he will remain in it and cannot be moved between certificate and non-certificate programs.

To find a list of bulls enrolled in the program, breeders can go to Hereford.org, select "EPD Inquiry" on the left side of the page and then search for bulls by calving year and "Select if" a Non-Certificate AI Sire.

An agreement form was printed on Page 51 of the May/June 2006 *Hereford World*. For more information about the program, contact Ward at (816) 842-3757 or jward@hereford.org.

— by Leah Bond



This icon used in the *Hereford AI Book* denotes bulls entered in the Non-Certificate AI Sire Program.

Specific program requirements

- Calves born after Dec. 1, 2006, are eligible to be registered through the program.
- Every 250th artificial insemination (AI) or embryo transfer (ET) calf registered will be parentage verified.
- Producers will pay \$250 to enter a bull in the program.
- An agreement must be signed by all bull owners and filed at the American Hereford Association (AHA). If a bull is syndicated, then a representative of the syndicate must sign the agreement.
- Once a bull is entered into the program, he will remain in the program. He will not be able to move between certificate and non-certificate programs.

genetics over time due to the flexibility it gives producers to select sires that lead to progress in traits desired. This systematic approach to breeding can have a tremendous additive effect because of the long-term effect that a sire has on genetic progress.

Selecting proven bulls can have an unlimited effect on profit. I do want to caution producers that an increase in bottom line may not be seen in the first calf crop sired by proven bulls. Successful breeders throughout the country did not realize a real profit the first year. Dedication and commitment to a program is the key to success.

Remember, "Rome was not built in a year." This is another key reason that making good planned decisions with proven, solid genetics is essential for the success of a program. I always hear the same old story from breeders, "I am not concerned because I am not large enough to make a difference." I want to remind everyone that the average size of the purebred producer (no matter what breed) is less than 20 cows. Everyone does make a difference. One of the most profitable beef bulls ever owned by Select Sires came from a herd of less than 10 cows.

Finally let's think about management and costs for implementing AI. With today's synchronization protocols, a breeder can manage when to breed cows down to the minute. These protocols allow for tremendous flexibility in work

schedules. Costs are another issue to keep in mind. I would contend that AI doesn't cost; it pays. Let's think about the following points:

- Implementing AI reduces the number of bulls that need to be on hand during breeding season. This is a direct-cost savings in bull purchases. It also means that with fewer bulls producers save on fences, corrals and other equipment.
- Tighter calving intervals mean more calves earlier in a breeding season. When you have calves earlier in a breeding season, the breed-back opportunities are better.
- AI gives you the opportunity to make more genetic improvement within your herd by selecting genetics that will make your cattle more attractive to your customers.

Time is of the essence. There is no need to put off implementing some sort of AI program. Utilize the *Hereford AI Book*, *Hereford.org* and breeders' knowledge to make selection decisions. Also, remember the Non-Certificate AI Sire Program that was implemented last year. This program allows producers to sell semen on a bull without the extra expense or hassle of an AI certificate.

Plan to participate in our March Hereford Online 101. The topic will be AI and synchronization. Watch *Hereford eNews* and *Hereford.org* for more information. **HW**