

# The Red Hide Rebellion



Craig Huffhines

When the beef industry continues to differentiate the value of a feeder calf based on its color it tells me one thing — our beef industry is not a very mature industry. In fact, it says that the beef industry is still interested in establishing false values and misleading perceptions that are designed to take advantage of one segment of our business and line the pockets of another.

It's time to say no more to these falsehoods, misleading perceptions and mischaracterization of livestock in an effort to fit a color pattern that has become nothing more than an overstated value standard to fit a now commodity black-hided brand.

## Auction market dilemma

The rub between the auction market system and red hide or, for that matter, color-hided beef cattle has really gone too far. Now I'm not saying that every market maker is guilty, but there is no viable explanation for why a sale barn operator

sorts off the 10-15% of the red-baldie calves from a string of black-baldie steer and heifer mates that were raised under the same conditions, possess basically the same genetics, and are more than likely to perform the very same through the feeding phase of production and on to the packer grade rail. I'm quite confident that when a mixed pen of red and black baldies are placed on show lists across the feeding sector, there is no difference in the bid for those pens compared to the bid on a straight set of blacks.

A set of baldie calves produced from the same set of black-baldie cows, out of Angus or Hereford bulls, will be both black and red in color. The red factor will surely turn up in that cow herd, which has resulted in an arbitrary penalizing sort at many auction markets across the country.

Are not these auction markets supposed to be working for the cow-calf man? Do cattlemen not pay a commission for these auction services? Don't auction markets receive a higher commission check when they package and sell cattle at the highest value? Yes, they can say that the order buyers are asking them to sort them off because the feeding industry demands it, but the feeding industry knows better.

It's time that the disparaging attitudes toward hide color change. It's costing our industry millions of dollars in lost opportunity as the whole system discourages the pursuit of heterosis through

planned crossbreeding. Look at the majority of continental European breeds that gave way to the black-hide movement only to recreate breeds to be at least half black Angus genetics; again, more hybrid vigor was taken from the commercial sector.

## Where we sit today

Now the industry faces a new challenge — the cost of feed and fuel. The expansion of ethanol production under the government's fuel policy has put unanticipated burdens on the beef cattle industry cost structure. High-energy feed grains are being redirected into ethanol production, creating an economic challenge for food animal production. Adjustments to this new cost burden will not happen overnight.

Not only will the beef industry be asked to produce a high-quality product, but producers will be asked to do it efficiently. The industry will have to use every genetic tool left in the tool shed in order to identify cattle that can excel on less feed resources.

Many of those genetics do not carry a black hide. In fact, the easygoing, easy-fleshing Hereford breed may just be in a position to make a real effect on this new dynamic the beef industry is facing. Attitudes will have to change over this color issue, and if attitudes toward red-hided cattle do not change at your local market, then you might want to investigate other options for marketing high-quality cattle. There are market channels that are more reasonable than others. **HW**

## 2007 nominating committee named

The American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors has named this year's nominating committee, which is responsible for identifying six candidates to vie for the AHA Board in October 2007. The nominating committee members are:

**Dale Venhuizen**, chairman, Manhattan, Mont.

**Tommy Mead**, Midville, Ga.

**Jim Gillooly**, Washington, Ind.

**Jim Mickelson**, Santa Rosa, Calif.

**Vern Rausch**, Hoven, S.D.