

Two Traits You Cannot Live Without



Craig Huffhines

Congratulations, Hereford breeders, for what continues to be a record-setting bull sale season. Had it not been for the serious drought conditions in the Southwest that have substantially shrunk the cow herd in the state of Texas, these prices might even be higher than what we are witnessing.

The resurgence in the Hereford breed, coupled with record high calf prices, has obviously generated enthusiasm for many of you Hereford breeders as well. We have witnessed an amazing investment in herd bulls this spring, and it is thrilling to see the excitement and capital investment that is being spent on genetics.

With all of the good that is occurring in the marketplace, I would like to offer a word of caution. My message is simple — the Hereford breed must work diligently to prevent this trend from becoming a fad.

A fad is defined as “a craze or an intense but short-lived interest or a period of time of exaggerated zeal.” The results of this most recent sale season are certainly not an overnight fad. This trend has been incubating and growing over the last several years.

The economic advantages of crossbreeding and the value of baldie cattle have a great deal of scientific merit. Science backs up the investment that is taking place in the Hereford breed. However, as producers of a breed of cattle, we must not step on our toes at this critical time and lower our standards of quality. If we compromise quality, then history tells us that this trend will become a fad.

We have documented the fact that commercial cattlemen are coming back to Hereford bulls in great numbers. Many of the younger generation of buyers have not purchased a Hereford bull in their lifetimes, while for others it has been a decade or two since Hereford has been a part of their breeding programs.

Disposition, structural soundness

Hybrid vigor is the big reason they are coming back to Hereford, but there are other reasons as well. Disposition and functional structure are other reasons why they are coming back to Hereford bulls. Why, because cattle temperament and longevity have tremendous value in the business. These are two selection criteria that do not show up in your menu of expected progeny differences (EPDs), but their importance to the business is as valuable as a “super star” panel of balanced EPDs.

Identification of disposition outliers is just plain common sense, and you just know which cows you can and cannot trust when your grandkids are in the pen. However, structural soundness requires some experience and knowledge. It is more subjective. Just because an animal can walk doesn't mean it has the structure to hold up to years of harsh environment.

Furthermore, structural soundness, or the lack thereof, can erase any advantages of hybrid vigor in a crossbreeding program by cutting potential years of production short. Structural

soundness has been one of the key principles for animal selection for centuries whether it's selecting the elite herd bull or the race horse that can hold up on the track.

In modern day sports medicine, skeletal structure and form play a major part in defining athleticism. Hereford seedstock that make the cut should be considered athletes. Defining what the structural correctness of an athlete should be takes some training and understanding of live animal evaluation and anatomy.

If you feel uncomfortable with evaluating structure in cattle, I suggest that you contact your American Hereford Association (AHA) regional field representative, a local beef cattle specialist trained in live cattle evaluation, a local judging team coach or a fellow breeder who has a good understanding of soundness in livestock.

All of our AHA regional field reps have a tremendous understanding of what the good ones should look like, and they can help you to identify problems that you might have in your herd. Every person can learn something in this business. Please, don't be afraid to ask others what they know about live cattle evaluation if this is an area you feel a bit uncomfortable with.

There is no shame in wanting to become more knowledgeable. Your knowledge will be important in maintaining Hereford market-share growth into the future. **HW**

Annual Meeting dates, location announced

The American Royal has changed the dates for its livestock show this fall. Because of these changes, the American Hereford Association Annual Meeting dates and location will also change in 2012.

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us in Kansas City Nov. 2-4. The AHA headquarters hotel will be the Argosy Casino Hotel and Spa. Watch for reservation information in future *Hereford World* issues and in *Hereford eNews*. **HW**