

LARGE or small,

It Works Well for All

BuyHereford.com is proving to be an effective marketing tool for Hereford breeders — large and small, alike.

by **Christy Couch Lee**

It's a fact. Producers of different sizes and scopes face different marketing needs and challenges.

The larger producer may need an outlet for a heifer or bull or for an embryo or semen package that doesn't fit within his production sale. And, the smaller producer may seek an opportunity to offer his or her genetics to a wider audience.

Perhaps it comes as a surprise that the American Hereford Association (AHA) offers a tool to assist with the marketing needs of all Hereford breeders — *BuyHereford.com*.

BuyHereford.com features monthly consignment sales, in which breeders can consign cattle and cattle-related items. In addition, breeders have the option of hosting private online sales through the site.

"In my mind, *BuyHereford.com* is a marketing tool for Hereford breeders to reach out to some potential customers they may not reach otherwise," says Dennis Schock, *BuyHereford.com* manager. "Breeders can list anything — embryos, semen, registered females and bulls, show heifer prospects, steers and commercial cattle. They can even list equipment."

The process for consigning or buying is simple. And Hereford breeders who have utilized the service are finding great success.

Advantages for all

Schock says *BuyHereford.com* can benefit Hereford breeders of all sizes.

"Anyone who raises Hereford cattle can benefit," Schock says. "I see the biggest potential for breeders who don't have enough cattle to host their own production sale. Breeders who have two to four animals to sell each year can market these animals without an extreme cost and reach a nationwide audience."

Amy Phillips, Richmond, Mo., is one such breeder. She manages 15 cows on her grandparents' farm while working for Roth Hereford Farm in Windsor, Mo. Her primary focus is show heifer and bull production. Recently, she began embryo transfer work on her herd, placing embryos into her grandfather's commercial cows and cooperator herds.

She began using *BuyHereford.com* in the fall of 2010 by listing one heifer in the monthly consignment sale. Since then, she has sold two heifers, two embryo packages and a bull on

the site. In addition, she says, she checks the sale listings each month to potentially make purchases.

"*BuyHereford.com* has worked pretty well for me," Phillips says. "We've sold a heifer to Texas and to Missouri. Our bull went to California, and the embryos went to Oregon. It's helped with getting my genetics out there."

Phillips believes one of *BuyHereford.com*'s greatest advantages is the ability for producers of all sizes to market their genetics.

"It's a great opportunity for you to get your genetics in front of cattlemen across the country," she says. "It's also easy to use, and the cost is reasonable. It's an easy outlet for your cattle, once a month."

Although any breeder can benefit from the site, Phillips says, smaller breeders should give great consideration to its services.

"It's a great help to small breeders like myself," she says. "We don't have our own production sale, and we don't have a big name or resources to get our cattle out there."

Small and large

Although small breeders can greatly benefit from the service, large breeders can find tremendous advantages, as well, Schock says.

"Larger breeders who may host their own production sales can utilize the service as a cash flow throughout the year," Schock says. "Many breeders use the site to market embryos or cattle that don't fit their production sale."

In addition, larger producers can also utilize the service to host their own online sales.

BuyHereford.com

Just the facts

Monthly *BuyHereford.com* consignment sales are held the last Tuesday of each month, with the exception of some summer months. The deadline for each sale is two weeks prior.

Listing an animal costs \$50 with a photo and \$75 with a photo and video.

The commission for each animal or item sold is 8%. However, if the minimum is not met, no additional fee is charged.

New this year, bidding will begin at the consignor's floor price. Bids will no longer be accepted below the floor price.

Individual production sales can be negotiated by contacting Dennis Schock at 903-815-2004 or dschock@hereford.org.

"We conducted production sales for Curry Herefords, Fall Harvest, McMullin-Spearhead and Falling Timber Farm last fall," Schock says. "Breeders can sell 15-25 lots of their own cattle. They may not have the numbers to host a sale in the conventional fashion, but we can host it online and produce the sale more economically. We can help them establish their own marketing program."

Curtis Curry, Curry Herefords, McAlester, Okla., says he has checked the listings each month for as long as *BuyHereford.com* has been established. And, he has bid on cattle for the past year.

Last summer, he worked with Schock to coordinate a fall online production sale for Curry Herefords.

"We sold 12 heifers and averaged \$3,750, which was a good response," he says. "We could also see how many hits each photo and video received. Our first heifer lot received almost 8,000 hits."

Curry says cattle in this sale sold to states including Idaho, New York, Missouri and Oklahoma.

"This sale opened up markets for us," he says. "The cattle sold to several states, and I couldn't have gotten them to my place to look, in person, otherwise."

Jim Nelson, Nelson Land & Cattle Co., Plano, Texas, says his operation has also found great success with *BuyHereford.com*. Nelson has listed two or three lots sporadically in the monthly consignment sales.

Earlier this year, Nelson Land & Cattle hosted an online embryo and semen sale through the site.

"We realized we had quite a bit of extra frozen embryos and semen in the tank," Nelson says. "We decided to host our own sale, rather than consigning them to the monthly consignment sales."

Nelson says he was extremely pleased with the sale, which boasted results of 56 embryos averaging \$424, three pregnant recipients averaging \$3,350 and 187 units of semen averaging \$91.

"We had a variety of quality product," he says. "There was something for everyone. We hoped

The process: bidding online

Every buyer must sign up on the site and be prequalified to be an approved buyer at the auction. To sign up as a bidder:

- Go to *BuyHereford.com* and click on "Register" at the top of the page.
- Read the "Online Auction Terms and Conditions/User Agreement."
- If you accept the agreement, you will then need to select "I Agree," and this will prompt you to fill out a bidder profile with your name, contact information and credit card information.
- After you submit a profile, the auction system will e-mail you a bidder number.
- You can use this bidder number and a password you selected when registering to bid on all *BuyHereford.com* online sales.

to create interest and generate some bidding, and we did. Normally, these types of sales don't get bidding until the hour before the close of the sale. But we had lots of activity, beginning the first day. Lots of people were watching it."

Making it work

In order to have great success, it's important to keep a few key ideas in mind. Schock says although the conventional methods of preparing an animal for sale are not entirely necessary, breeders should still do some preparation.

"You need to make the maximum effort to market your cattle," he says. "Get them prepared, and spend some time and money to take a good photo. That will enhance the animal's value."

Video, he says, is also a bonus. "If you're going to sell live cattle online, video is also key," Schock says. "It's important when marketing live cattle to have a video. And any of the AHA field staff can help you get those photos and video, should you need assistance."

Curry says asking for an AHA representative's assistance with photos and videos helped greatly with his online production sale last fall.

"Schock came and photographed our offering for us," he says. "It worked well because we had them ready to go."

Phillips says a good photo is essential for success on *BuyHereford.com* — or on any online sale.

"I think a bad photo is worse than no photo at all," she says. "Video is also becoming a big thing, and I hope to begin using it this year. When people can't see the cattle in person, they need as much information as possible."

In addition, Schock says, consignors should contact potential buyers, as with any sale.

"You can't just stick an animal's photo up there and expect it to sell," he says. "You have to get out and market your cattle, no matter what method you use."

Phillips adds the *BuyHereford.com* method is simple.

"It's really straightforward," she says. "You simply fill out a form online, upload a photo, and mail a check or pay by PayPal. It's easy to use."

In fact, Phillips believes many producers may not realize how easy or how reasonably priced a *BuyHereford.com* listing can be.

"It seems like whenever anyone asks me how I did on *BuyHereford.com*,

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BuyHereford.com

By the numbers

When it began: November 2009

Total page views: 500,557

Average hits per online auction: 17,260

Unique Internet connections: 77,510

Number of *BuyHereford.com* registered bidders: 1,580 from 43 states, plus Canada and Australia

The process: consigning

Go to BuyHereford.com and click on the "Entry Forms" tab to find the consignment agreement. Read this page and follow instructions.

Then, at BuyHereford.com/EntryFormList.html, you can choose an entry form to submit.

An initial nonrefundable, up-front fee of \$50 per pictured animal or product or \$75 for a videoed animal or product will be charged to consign. Once the animal or product is sold, an 8% commission will be deducted from the sale price. The commission and fee for a producer consignment sale is negotiable.

Consignors can post photos and video clips. See BuyHereford.com for format guidelines. One week before each auction, an online catalog of consignments will be available. Note: all pedigree information, photos and entry fees may be submitted online. For more information, visit BuyHereford.com/FAQ.html or BuyHereford.com/contacts.html.

they follow up by asking how much it costs," she says. "It's very reasonable."

Above all, Curry says, preparation is key for a successful BuyHereford.com sale.

"If you're going to have a sale in May, you need to begin preparing in February," he says. "And, if you plan to have a sale in the fall, start planning now. Get with Dennis [Schock] and set the date. If you don't set the date, you'll never do it."

And if you set the date, chances are, you'll be pleased with the results.

Seeing success

Schock says the exposure a breeder can receive through listing on the site is well worth the small fee — even if the animal doesn't reach the minimum bid.

"It's another part of a marketing program that is easy and economical," he says. "The exposure you can gain is nationwide. Look at the numbers of people who go into the website to look at the cattle. Where else can you go to advertise directly to that large of your key market? It can be done at a relatively low cost, and if you do it right, you can benefit."

Nelson says he believes the greatest advantage of BuyHereford.com is the targeted market it reaches.

"If you're in the Hereford business, that's who BuyHereford.com reaches," he says. "Your No. 1 customer — the member of the American Hereford Association — is who it reaches."

Nelson says he is impressed with the quality of the technology of BuyHereford.com, as well.

"We've had a few problems in the past, working with Internet sales companies," he says. "But BuyHereford.com does a great job. I was pleased with the overall way it was organized, and how it ran on the seller end."

And he's not the only one who's pleased.

Raving reviews

Schock says he has received an overall positive response about breeders' experiences with BuyHereford.com.

"The semen and embryo sales have been awesome," he says. "And, many who have sold semen and embryos through BuyHereford.com have had customers come back later to buy more embryos, semen or cattle."

Nelson believes semen and embryo packages are perfect for the online sale environment.

"You don't have to really look at the offering the way you do with a live animal, and you don't have many shipping problems," he says. "However, with photos and video, I do believe the live animal sales online will continue to grow."

Phillips says the sale of her live animals on the site has led to additional sales down the road.

"The gentleman from California who purchased our bull has said when I have something else for sale, to let him know," Phillips says. "I have also had breeders in Missouri say they've seen my cattle for sale on the site. It's kept my name out there."

With Curry's sale being held just before the American Royal in Kansas

City, he says many breeders spoke with him at the show about his sale offering.

"When we walked into the barns at Kansas City, people hit me up and talked with me about the sale," he says. "I would have never imagined who would have gone to the sale to look at it. We typically market most of our cattle privately, but BuyHereford.com is a good avenue for us, and we will do it again."

Curry says if a producer is interested in hosting a BuyHereford.com sale, take the leap and try it.

"Don't be afraid," he says. "If you don't have a production sale and need to market your cattle, BuyHereford.com is a great way to do it. It's an inexpensive way to get your name out in front of everyone. If you have any apprehension, just put an animal or two in a monthly consignment sale and try it."

Nelson agrees.

"Do your homework and talk to people who have used it," he says. "Get with Dennis, and work with him personally. He can help you a lot, if you haven't had much online sales experience in the past."

Focus on the future

Schock says the future of BuyHereford.com is bright. In fact, the program has experienced tremendous growth in the past six months.

"We've seen a lot of growth in the number of people going onto the website and looking at the sales," he says. "We've done more promotion of the service through e-mails and advertising in Hereford World."

Prior to 2011, BuyHereford.com had conducted only two production sales. However, Schock says, five sales were hosted last fall and this winter, and the calendar is already filling for fall 2012 dates.

Schock says he foresees more video work provided by BuyHereford.com in the future as well as increased individual breeder sales.

Based on the growing success Hereford breeders have experienced through BuyHereford.com, it's safe to say participation and results will only continue to grow. Large or small — for producers in the Hereford business, BuyHereford.com offers it all. **HW**