

# Genetic Summit Will Focus on New Industry Dynamics



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The beef complex has been extremely kind to the cow-calf sector the last few years. Prices for calves, feeder cattle and fed cattle have moved to new highs on an annual basis for three consecutive years. However, profitability has been dampened by extreme increases in input cost.

Cattlemen have paid dearly for this current market as revolving drought conditions have cycled around a large part of cow country causing a mass exodus of cows to market. Since 2006 cow numbers have dropped more than 4 million head, reducing bull power by more than 215,000 required bulls annually.

That's more than four times the current number of Hereford bulls produced annually to market to the industry. Environmental strain along with new market dynamics that have become affected by socio-economic change have raised serious questions regarding how to operate in the future.

The Hereford breed has reaped the rewards of producing a product that at least 25% of U.S. beef producers are happy with; but what will be required of the breed in the future to maintain that loyalty? More importantly, what will be required of the Hereford breed in order to increase market share in what appears to be a shrinking industry?

## Plan to attend Summit

The American Hereford Association (AHA) will host a Hereford Genetic Summit Sept. 4-5 in Springfield, Mo.,

to discuss these issues and more. Questions abound during these dynamic industry changes and challenges. Questions such as what will be the future demands on the U.S. beef industry now influenced by global markets? Will cow efficiency and true feed conversion become increasingly important in genetic selection decisions? What is the Hereford breed's trend in addressing economic needs? What is the commercial industry saying about the modern Hereford?

The AHA Board and staff are currently putting together a thought-provoking program, inviting industry leaders to discuss and debate these interesting issues. If you plan to be a breeder of Hereford genetics in the next five to 10 years, then this is a meeting you won't want to miss.

Conferences such as these, in the past called "type conferences," typically have had a major influence on the direction of the Hereford breed. In the last millennium, two dominant type changes occurred that left a lasting legacy on the Hereford breed: the "Age of the Shorts" and the "Age of the Giants." Both trends developed in response to market signals, but both also derailed the breed as breeders had to work to adjust for overcorrection.

An incredible example of reacting to market signals was born out of the Wisconsin Type Conference in 1969. Honed in on the economic cost of production, conference planners scoured the country to identify larger-framed

Hereford steers in the frame 5 range that could be used as an examples of what was desperately needed to upgrade the growth and efficiency of cattle that was predominantly frame 3s and 4s.

Finding only a few 5 frame cattle in the entire country, a promise was made that larger-framed cattle could address the issue of faster daily gain at less cost conversion of feed, the production of more muscle and less fat, and the signal for far less loss in offal waste — all changes attributing to the desired market kind preferred by packers. Breeders took on the challenge and the frame race began. It didn't take long to take Hereford seedstock to frame 8s and 9s within a 20-year period of time, and the rest is history.

Today, times are no less challenging economically. However, the demands are much more complex than simply improving frame size and end weight. Genetic selection tools are much more dynamic; they address both simple and difficult to measure economically relevant traits and have begun to be upgraded through genomic enhanced technology.

The "Genomic Age" has now launched delivering more reliable, higher accuracy tools that will aid in a faster response to trends with less guesswork. That being said, it will be critically important to know where the marketplace is heading so that the investment in this technology will not be used in vain.

Plan to attend the Genetic Direction Summit: Get on the Cutting Edge — an event you will not want to miss. We'll make sure you have a great time while you're there. **HW**