

'He Wants It All,' but What Does It Mean?



Jack Ward

During the CattleFax report at the Cattle Industry Convention and National Cattlemen's Beef Association Trade Show in late January, it was clear to see that the U.S. cattle herd is expanding. Just as severe drought from 2010 to 2012 reduced numbers to 60-year lows, record-high prices in 2014 and abundant moisture have allowed ranchers to rebuild herds at a fast pace.

"We are coming off historic highs in the cattle market, created by unique conditions in both the global and domestic protein markets," said Randy Blach, CattleFax CEO, on Jan. 29 at the convention.

"Dynamics, specifically larger protein supplies, led to a significant correction in price in 2015. A large portion of the market downtrend is over now. However, the cycle shows prices continuing to trend lower in 2016, 2017 and 2018."

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However, John Nalivka, president of Sterling Marketing Inc., Vale, Ore., said, "We've seen four to five years of strong profits for cow-calf operations, and even with expected lower prices this year, average cow-calf profits should remain near \$250 per cow. Historically, that's very good."

As producers continue to rebuild, the focus does seem to be on the cow herd, but as the American Hereford Association (AHA) national ad tagline suggests, "He wants it all."

Commercial producers are looking to add some heterosis to their cow herd to help with economically relevant traits, like fertility, that are lowly heritable and are boosted more through an alternate breed for an F1 cow.

But, this cow has to do it all. Not only must she get bred, but she must calve unassisted, be easy to handle and raise a calf with some weight — and she must also do it with minimal inputs. Then, that calf must wean with no health issues, grow efficiently and then produce a carcass that has value and will be demanded and accepted by the consumer.

What does "doing it all" mean to the Hereford breed? It means Hereford has a great opportunity to be the breed of choice as the cow herd continues to expand.

It has been proven over time that Hereford cattle have the ability to adapt to various environments and should be a key component in a commercial cow herd because of reproductive and maintenance efficiency, disposition and structural soundness, but these traits are not enough — "He wants it all."

So, breeders need balanced selection that focuses on all parts of the industry. The tools are available today and are backed by Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™), a comprehensive young sire test and genomics to make selections that can have a positive effect at all levels of production.

As the margins get tighter in the cow-calf sector, the opportunity for Hereford genetics in the U.S. cattle herd gets greater. Identify the genetics that work, listen to your customers and keep making sound breeding decisions. **HW**

