



Most producers continually seek marketing opportunities to develop new customers and increase revenue. In this section we look at three such opportunities. Signs show that cattlemen want to buy bulls that can go out and go to work; Teresa Oe explains how three progressive bull tests are meeting industry demands in **Attention to Signs Leads to Success**, page 70. An increasing number of producers are reacting to market signs and finding success utilizing video marketing; learn more in **Marketing Feeder Cattle the Video Way**, page 74. Some producers don't have the numbers to offer loads of cattle; in **Hard Work That Pays**, page 76, read how breeders in two states have developed feeder-calf sales to capture value for quality, well-managed cattle.



Bud Shaver manages the Mid-Atlantic Bull Development Program in Weyers Cave, Va. This view overlooks the Shenandoah Valley with the Allegheny Mountains in the distance.

Attention to Signs Leads to Success

Progressive bull tests rise to meet industry demands.

by **Teresa Oe**

Certain signs in the cattle industry have triggered the development of new bull test programs as well as modifications in established tests. Whether it's commercial cattlemen, seedstock producers or organizations sending the signs, one thing is clear — program leaders who respond swiftly are those who succeed. The following three tests have caught the attention of

cattlemen with unique features that address industry signs specific to regional demands.

Mid-Atlantic Bull Development Program

Signs that direct the Mid-Atlantic Bull Development Program are those of the commercial cattleman who demands a functional bull that will perform long after test data is collected. Five years ago, the Virginia Hereford Association (VHA) started this program in the Shenandoah Valley to develop and sell the highest quality Hereford bulls in Virginia, without pushing hot rations. It's not necessarily a race to gain, but a chance to evaluate genetics and breeding programs, explains Bob Schaffer, VHA president. "Bud Shaver manages the test and does an outstanding job," he adds.

Since initial setup, the bull development program has expanded to allow Hereford breeders from all states to test their programs against those of fellow breeders. Consignors from other eastern states have since begun to participate, including West Virginia and Maryland producers.

Schaffer is the first to admit that the standards for the development program are tough. Only the best bulls graduate based on a set of criteria developed by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and centered on guidelines established years ago by the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association. Criteria emphasize the needs of the commercial cattleman. The following items help determine whether a bull can achieve "Virginia's Finest" certification.

- The bull must have all available official EPDs (expected progeny differences) provided by the American Hereford Association (AHA).
- Minimum adjusted weaning weight must be 550 lb. with a minimum weaning weight ratio of 95.
- When delivered to the test station, the bull must weigh a



Breeders who consign to the Green Springs Bull Test get something that no other private test offers, individual feed efficiency data.

minimum of 2.5 lb. per day of age.

- The minimum adjusted yearling weight must be 1,050 lb., with a minimum yearling weight ratio of 95 within the test group.
- The minimum test gain ratio is 95.
- Frame score must be between 5.0 and 7.9.
- The bull must pass a thorough reproductive soundness exam, including scrotal measurement and palpation. Bulls more than 16 months of age are semen evaluated.

The bulls are also evaluated on ultrasound measurements — backfat (BF), ribeye (REA) and intramuscular fat (IMF) — as well as muscling, structural soundness, disposition and overall quality. The final index is calculated with one-half credit given to the yearling weight ratio and one-half credit given to the test gain ratio.

A bull that meets each criterion is issued a Virginia's Finest Performance Tested Bull Certificate to be transferred to the bull buyer. The certificate lists the herd and tattoo number, breed registration number, test and station number, all performance test data, and EPDs. Schaffer says that Mid-Atlantic buyers generally get more performance data to assist with bull selection than they've received purchasing bulls at other places in the past.

A certification based on a second set of criteria developed by the VHA with even higher expectations, "Virginia's Finest

Top Guns," affords consignors the opportunity to qualify for entry in the VHA Bull Sale at the Virginia Beef Expo in Harrisonburg, Va.

Bulls not qualifying for either level of certification, at the consignor's request, can be moved to a stockyard and sold for slaughter.

While it's tough to see bulls not graduate from the program, Schaffer is confident that the rules must stay if genetic improvement in the breed is to occur. "The opportunity for Hereford cattle is coming back now," he says. "It's not so much about getting the bulls graduated, as it is about getting the right product to the commercial customer." The signs of demand must be met with a useable product.

Richard Lloyd, VDACS Livestock Marketing Services, testifies to the progression of the bull development program. In the first years of operation, Lloyd says that a small percentage of the bulls met program criteria. As a member of the team that evaluates the bulls for muscling, structural soundness and overall quality, Lloyd estimates that 75-80% of the bulls now meet these standards. "Yearling weights and rate of gain are also steadily improving," he says. Lloyd explains that consignors are identifying the lines that perform well in the program and therefore the commercial producer's program as well.

Douglas and Melissa Harrison of Meadow Ridge Farms in Broadway, Va., are first-time consignors. They raise registered Hereford cattle and also have a commercial herd. The family chose

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to get involved in the test after purchasing a bull from Schaffer that had been developed in the program. They were pleased with the bull's performance, and Schaffer helped them pick a couple of their own bulls to be enrolled in the program. The bulls developed well, with one bull graduating ninth in his class of 32 peers.

Melissa likes the development approach, as she says the bulls are growing at their own rates, proving what they can do without being pushed too hard. When the Meadow Ridge Farms' bulls go to the test station, Melissa says that she accepts the fact that the bulls may not return home, if not proven top quality. It's a risk she and her husband are willing to take to develop the best genetics for their herd and customers.

WCA/WSU Bull Test

The Washington Cattlemen's Association (WCA) and Washington State University (WSU) developed a bull test 13 years ago in response to signs they were receiving from seedstock producers of the area. WCA leadership recognized the need for something more to offer these cattlemen in order to expand membership. A bull test seemed the best way to advance, as there were no other tests in the state.

The WCA approached Art Linton, WSU beef cattle specialist, about the possibility of organizing a test. "WSU certainly had the facilities and the expertise to make



Forty-two Hereford bulls were consigned to the Washington Cattlemen's Association/Washington State University Bull Test this year.

it work," says Jack Field, WCA executive director.

Accordingly, the bull test has grown with amazing success. One hundred sixty-three bulls, including 42 horned and polled Herefords, were consigned to the 120-day program this year. Angus, Red Angus and Simmental bulls comprised the remaining numbers, with each breed serving as a contemporary group. Ten other breeds have also been tested in years past. The stipulation is that each breed group has at least five bulls to test. Consignors must be WCA members, but don't have to be from Washington. Breeders from four other states have participated.

Test bulls have received almost the same ration for all 13 years. The 70% roughage, 30% concentrate mix has provided for the desired expression of genetic potential and a marketable product — bulls that can go right to work breeding cows and remain sound over several years, Linton says. The ration was designed to facilitate an average daily gain (ADG) of 3.25 lb. per day, but Linton has found that the gains have been increasing simply due to increased genetic merit in the program's consignments.

Between nature and nurture, the program has been able to provide a satisfying product for its buyers, primarily commercial cattlemen. A few years back, WCA and WSU sent out a buyer's survey asking for feedback on the perception of the condition of the bulls after coming off the test. "Comments were very favorable," Linton says.

This satisfaction is reflected in the number of repeat customers the sale has seen over the years, according to Field. Cattlemen from 10 states, Canada and

Mexico have made purchases.

Should signs appear that the ration, environment, etc., are not meeting industry demands, the WCA breeds committee is responsible for restructuring. The committee meets a couple times a year to review the test, its rules and management.

Committee members are careful to follow the Beef Improvement Federation guidelines published for bull tests. After improvements are decided upon, it's then up to Linton and other WSU staff to implement the changes.

Some such changes have been related to the increased demand for data in recent years. The WCA/WSU Bull Test made ultrasound data available to all consignors and buyers in 2000. Last year, economic indexes specific to each breed were also added to the data offerings, including three of the four Hereford profit indexes (Baldie Maternal Index, Calving EZ Index and Certified Hereford Beef Index). A fact sheet generally accompanies new data to instruct cattlemen on how to interpret the numbers.

Of course, the drive toward electronic communication has also had an effect on the WCA/WSU Bull Test. A Web site, www.prosser.wsu.edu/Faculty/Linton.html, is home to a wealth of information about the test, including beginning, 40-day, 80-day and final reports, as well as ultrasound data. "The number of people accessing the Web site has dramatically increased," Linton says.

On March 22, the top 75% of this year's test bulls were sold at the WSU Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center near Prosser, Wash. The night prior, Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president, addressed cattlemen at the All Breed Bull Test Social Hour and Breeders' Forum. Huffhines talked about source verification and the value of documented bulls. Each year, a nationally known speaker presents

The
WCA breeds
committee watches
for signs of a need
for change.

on a timely topic of interest, followed by a “bull session.” Linton notes that nice turnouts at this annual tradition reflect a growing interest in the entire event.

For the first time this year, sale day included a trade show organized by the WCA Allied Industry members consisting of livestock related associations and companies. This group also hosted a lunch.

In years to come, you can bet that the list of return customers will continue to grow as the WCA/WSU sale continues to evolve into a complete industry event.

Green Springs Bull Test

When Kent Abele, Nevada, Mo., attended college at the University of Missouri-Columbia, he helped with the school’s bull test program. Years later, a sign of opportunity appeared as the university test station closed. Relying on his expertise gained through college experiences and involvement in the seedstock industry, Abele began a privately owned program known as the Green Springs Bull Test.

In its first year of operation, the test drew in 56 bulls. Eight years later in 2006, Abele expects 650. Two test periods account for the majority of these numbers, one that begins in June for fall-born calves and one in early October for spring-born calves. Two smaller tests pick up the bulls that don’t fit into either of the larger groups.

The 112-day tests, consisting of high-forage mixed diets, are designed to put on about 3.5 lb. per day while keeping the bulls sound. The average pen ratio is 25 bulls to three acres of land.

As with other tests and sectors of the cattle industry, the signs that Abele are receiving most are those from producers, both purebred and commercial, demanding more information. “If people do not get the information they want, they just will not buy,” Abele says.

Abele has responded somewhat differently than most other test managers. In addition to EPDs and ultrasound measurements, he now offers feed efficiency data. One of only three test stations in the

nation and the only private one, Green Springs Bull Test provides its consignors and buyers with individual feed per lb. of gain and feed cost per lb. of gain data. Abele began this testing last fall.

“I was very impressed with the RFI (residual feed intake) of the Hereford bulls,” Abele says. About 20 of these polled Herefords went through the test sale held March 26 at Mo-Kan Livestock in Passaic, Mo., along with Angus, Red Angus, Simmental, Gelbvieh, Limousin, LimFlex, Charolais, South Devon and Balancer bulls.

On sale day, buyers didn’t have to take home their purchases immediately. Abele recognizes that most sellers want to sell yearling bulls and buyers want to buy 2-year-old bulls. To help remedy this gap, Abele offers to keep the bulls until 18 months of age for a set fee per day. This way, he attracts more buyers and accommodates consignors as well.

Hundreds of bulls, some staying months after their tests, create quite the workload. “You need a good staff,” says Abele, whose crew consists of his wife, Kathy; son, Cole; and hired hand, Danny Amick.

Abele also relies on the input of longtime consignors and friends like Marty Lueck, manager of Journagan Ranch, Mountain Grove, Mo. “He’s always picking my brain,” Lueck says of Abele. Where Lueck feels he’s been able to contribute most is with sale planning, since the large polled Hereford ranch he’s managed for 25 years holds its own private sale.

Journagan Ranch has consigned up to 10 bulls to the Green Springs Bull Test in years past. The ranch tests its own bulls as well, but Lueck likes to see how Journagan genetics compete with others in the breed. In feed efficiency, Lueck had consignments rank No. 1, 2, 4 and 5 in the polled Hereford group last fall. With this information



Marty Lueck, manager of Journagan Ranch, Mountain Grove, Mo., has participated in the Green Springs Bull Test every year since setup. Lueck (left) and Kent Abele (right), program owner, have witnessed the test grow from under 60 bulls to more than 600 in eight years.

and introduction to buyers in a new area of Missouri, Journagan Ranch has expanded its marketing opportunities.

Lueck is pleased with a ratio Abele has developed to rank test bulls. Abele ratios ADG, weight per day of age WDA, ribeye area REA and intramuscular fat IMF. He then averages these data to get a final index. The index determines sale order, a principle that Lueck appreciates for keeping the bull lineup fair and easy.

Abele says the Green Springs Bull Test has grown the way it has primarily because of word of mouth. With supporters like Lueck, the good word travels fast. “I enjoy working with Kent,” Lueck says. “He’s a sharp cowboy.”

For more information about this test, visit www.greenspringsbulltest.com. To locate a test in your area, see page 37 in the Hereford Handbook included in this issue of the *Hereford World*, or contact your state cattlemen’s association or local Extension office. **HW**

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— Kent Abele