

# Genetic Improvement and Marketing Work Together



Jack Ward

As this summer speeds by, breeders should begin to think about the marketing opportunities they have for their product. Not only should you be thinking about this year's crop, but you should also be thinking about what might lie ahead. Fortunately, the American Hereford Association (AHA) provides members with the tools to make informed decisions, and these tools can also help you market your cattle.

The biggest challenge that most breeders face is, "Should I breed for genetic improvement or marketing?" I would suggest that this question could be answered the same: "Yes!" You should breed for genetic improvement because it will help you market your cattle.

Let's take a look at the tools that are at your fingertips for making the most informed decisions:

1) One of the world's largest databases allows you to compare animals by utilizing expected progeny differences (EPDs). Selecting cattle "by the numbers" gives you some satisfaction and safety. If you incorporate some highly proven genetics within your herd, those sires will allow you to make genetic improvement more rapidly in those areas that your customers demand. Remember, your customers and your environment should have the most important influence on your decisions. These numbers are backed up by Whole Herd Total Performance Records

(TPR™), which has really changed the complexion of the Hereford breed. When I started in 2003 and watched bulls in the system, some bulls would shift significantly from one analysis to the next. Today, bulls do not move much, and when we see young sires coming through our structured tests, they perform almost according to the differences in their numbers.

2) The National Reference Sire Evaluation Program (NRSEP) has given Hereford breeders of all sizes the opportunity to test their bulls next to some of the best the breed has to offer. This, in turn, has given these sires the accuracy it takes to give breeders confidence to incorporate them into their programs. The AHA has expanded these test herds each year to allow more bulls to be tested. In addition, there have been a few tests set up to include some feed efficiency trials, disposition scoring and even structure scoring.

3) There have been several recognition programs set up to find the animals within the breed that have performed and to acknowledge breeders who have really worked hard at collecting and submitting data. Dams of Distinction (DOD) recognizes females that have performed above the average of their contemporaries and have done this in a very timely fashion. Herefords are a British breed and should

be considered within a crossbreeding scheme to help improve maternal traits. On the flip side, Sires of Distinction (SOD) and Certified Hereford Beef Sires (CHBS) were developed to find the sires that have produced progeny that have turned the crank.

4) Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) and the programs associated with CHB have provided tools for breeders and their customers to market cattle. Feedlots have started to demand Hereford-influenced cattle because those cattle perform at a profitable level.

These programs along with all of the marketing opportunities provided by Hereford Publications Inc. (HPI) can help you market your cattle. So, while you are striving to make genetic improvement, you will also be helping your marketing opportunities.

Recently, my family and I were listening to a homily at church, and I was really taken by a statement that our priest made. He said, "One of the longest journeys in the world is the one between your heart and your head." Obviously, he had a much different meaning than the one I was thinking of, but it was still very profound to me. If, as breeders, we would use our heads to make breeding decisions instead of our hearts, we could truly make improvement.

I would encourage you to study the information, search the Web, study the top 200 lists and listen to your customers as well as talk with breeders and your field staff to make the most informed decisions for

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Beginning in January 2009, the AHA will no longer use blood typing for parental verification. Any sire or dam that has been blood typed and not had DNA collected will not be available for use to qualify as an artificial insemination (AI) sire or embryo transfer (ET) dam.

your breeding programs. Your heart may take you in the right direction, but your head must make the most informed decision.

### **Carcass EPD changes**

In this issue, you will find an article by Dan Moser that discusses a change in the carcass EPD (see Page 22). This change is simply a move from an ultrasound base to a “real-data” base.

In other words, we are changing from %IMF to marbling, which is how we truly measure the value of a carcass. This change will make ultrasound even more important because of the high correlation in the Hereford breed between ultrasound and real measurements.

Just as with most traits, breeders can select for genetic change for carcass within the Hereford breed with confidence. This is true because

of the amount of ultrasound and real data that has been added to the genetic analysis. Breeders need to be complimented for implementing tools to make this change. Today, nearly 50% of yearling weight data collected comes in with a scan or carcass measurement. This is compared to about 25% five years ago.

### **AI use continues to grow**

Another area that has greatly influenced the accuracy of Hereford genetics is the use of artificial insemination (AI) in the breed and within the commercial industry. There has been more than a 30% increase in AI use within the purebred sector during the past five years and a tremendous increase in the commercial industry.

You can track this increase by looking at the numbers from the information provided by the National

Association of Animal Breeders. Both domestic and export sales of Hereford semen have been improving in the past few years. This improvement is due to the commitment of breeders making the genetic changes that the industry has asked for. Keep up the good work.

Finally, I want to let you know that research is ongoing in looking at ways to measure fertility and stayability. With input costs going up daily, we need to continue looking to stretch and push each cow to do all she can do to add to the profits of our program. Stay tuned for more about this research.

Remember that genetic improvement and marketing can and should be done at the same time. **HW**