

# Herefords' Undisputed Role in the Industry



For several years now, I have talked about the nonsensical demands placed on black hide color within the U.S. cattle industry. For years the U.S. beef sector has promoted and almost institutionalized the breeding of the national cow herd to an Angus or black-hided base. Hence, at least a dozen other breeds of cattle have followed suit in the chase of a more marketable animal since hide color has been more or less the deciding factor in sorting cattle into perceived quality groups.

A couple of years back, I had a discussion regarding breed improvement programs with a breed executive of one of the "turned black" breeds. We were talking about the top few reasons cows were being disposed of from our respective registered cow herds.

In the Hereford breed, cows were culled because they were old, they were open or they were tailing off on their production cycle, among others. For the other breed, the No. 1 factor for cows being culled was because of color. The breed was systematically eliminating genetics that many

breeders had spent a lifetime developing because the cows were not black. Now that, to me, is throwing the baby out with the bath water, but it has become common practice within our industry.

Today the economic cycle of the U.S. beef industry is dramatically changing along with other industries

struggling to make ends meet in a difficult recessionary economy. All of us are facing growing demands on input costs. The current government administration is, of all things, contemplating an added tax on beef producers because of the natural biological emissions cattle produce.

The term "cap and trade" is certainly an appropriate title to a tax that will absolutely cap profitability and kill trade. The green movement, as irrational as it might seem sometimes, is not going away. The feedlot industry is struggling not only to make money but simply to limit their losses during this down turn, and the American consumer is looking for a high-quality beef product purchased at a bargain.

I outline these trends simply because the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board, as well as Hereford breeders, understands that we must make our cattle better in order to compete; and we have! While working on things that improve the quality of our seedstock, we have also



Because of the heterosis advantages of using Hereford bulls on Angus-based cows, 500-lb. Angus calves would have to bring \$10-\$16 more per cwt. than baldie calves to equal profitability.

invested a great deal in research that has quantified what the Hereford breed can do for the cow-calf sector, the feedlot sector and the food industry to help during trying times.

The Harris Ranch project along with the Circle A project documented the real world heterosis advantages

that the Hereford breed brings to the table when crossed with Angus and Angus-cross cows. This heterosis/hybrid vigor effect directly affects long-term profitability of a cow-calf operation more dramatically than what most producers realize.

Cash flow, herd size, retained

fertility and longevity are major drivers of cow-calf profitability. They are difficult to measure, and they are rarely tracked at the commercial level, but agriculture economist Vern Pierce, from the University of Missouri, states that they are of great benefit to cattlemen over the long haul.

Pierce analyzed the data from the Circle A research project in which 10 Hereford bulls were compared to two top Angus bulls, all bred to more than 600 commercial Angus cows.

One of the Angus bulls was the top bull in the breed for registrations in 2008. Economically relevant traits from birth to carcass were measured on every calf, and the replacement females from the project were followed through to their first pregnancy. Pierce reported that the baldie program would return \$514 dollars per cow over 10 years or more than \$50 per head annually due to production advantages when compared to straight Angus commercial cows.

## Circle A research result highlights:

- Data predicts Hereford-sired females will have a \$50 annual advantage in profitability.
- Hereford-sired calves were within 3 lb. of the Angus calves at birth. The Angus bulls used were in the top 30% of the breed for birth weight EPD.
- The Hereford-sired calves were 11.9-lb. heavier at weaning than the Angus-sired calves.
- Hereford-sired calves had a carcass weight advantage of 13 lb. compared to the Angus-sired calves.
- While feed efficiency was nearly identical when compared to the progeny of Circle A's two top feed efficiency bulls, the Hereford-sired calves outgained the Angus-sired calves by .15 lb. per day.
- The Hereford-sired females had a 7% advantage in pregnancy rate compared to the Angus-sired females.

- The baldie females brought \$110 more than their straight black counterparts in Circle A's production sale.

Depending on the year and depending on the input costs, the Harris Ranch and Circle A studies have both proven that Hereford hybrid vigor generated from the crossing of the two most popular maternal breeds in America added \$50 to \$80 per head on an annual basis.

To make up this advantage, 500-lb. straight Angus calves would have to bring between \$10 to \$16 per hundredweight more than the baldie calves at the market. The reality is that many times producers see baldie calves bring more than the straight blacks when sold.

Baldie calves will qualify for every branded beef program in America. The message is clear, and we will continue to educate our commercial base of these advantages. If producers continue to avoid the Hereford breed because of the few red-hided calves they might produce, then I might just have to borrow a line from one of my favorite blue-collar comedians, Bill Engvall, when he says, "Here's your sign."

The continued practice of avoiding profitable genetic selection decisions because of hide color is just as ludicrous as charging a tax for cow flatulence.

## Laceys continue to use Herefords

As a result of the outcome of the three-year Harris Ranch project, Mark and John Lacey have begun to use Hereford bulls on a full-time basis to develop baldie replacement females for their mature cow herd. During the last two years, the Laceys have bred nearly all of their straight Angus replacement heifers to highly proven AI sires with great success. Reports from the ranch suggest that the calves are easy calving and vigorous with a high survival rate. **HW**



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