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Hereford Semen In Demand

NAAB and semen companies report increased demand for Hereford semen.

by *Angie Stump Denton*

Hereford genetics are becoming increasingly popular according to the National Association of Animal Breeders (NAAB) report.

U.S. Hereford semen sales increased 8.4% in 2008, despite an overall drop in domestic semen sales for beef cattle. Sales of Hereford semen rose 39.3% in foreign countries, well above the overall increase of all breeds at 21.67%, according to the 2008 data from NAAB.

"Hereford semen sales have been extremely good," says ABS Global Beef Sire Acquisition Manager Lorna Marshall. "Our Hereford sales are up about 20% this year, and Hereford has been our fastest-growing breed the last three years."

Marshall attributes much of this growing demand for Hereford semen to the cattleman's need for heterosis. "As we've seen the nation's cow herd become more straightbred, we've certainly heard from some of our commercial customers that they've experienced reduced fertility, as we've moved away from a cow herd that has some heterosis in it to more of a straightbred cow."

She says at ABS Global the staff has seen more interest in crossbreeding, and she thinks Herefords are a sensible choice. Marshall says, "We are in a new world with higher input costs and higher feed costs; people are looking at how to make a super efficient momma cow. And I think that has always been one of the strengths of Hereford cattle: they are low input, highly efficient cattle that cross well on Angus."

ABS Global currently has 18 Hereford bulls to choose from in its bull battery. Marshall says that for the



PHOTO BY JOE RICKBAUGH

first time during her 13-year tenure with ABS, there are two Hereford bulls in the company's top 25 beef bulls for semen sales.

Other bull semen companies are seeing comparable growth in Hereford demand. "We currently feature eight polled Hereford bulls in our program," says Brian House, Select Sires. "We seek bulls with moderate birth weight and frame size, above average

performance and carcass merit that will sire problem-free cattle."

House cites several reasons for increased Hereford semen demand including:

- 1) The Hereford breed has done a good job positioning itself as the British breed "Angus-alternative."
- 2) "The Efficiency Expert" ads from previous years have helped

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— *Lorna Marshall*

create enthusiasm for Hereford genetics. The American Hereford Association was talking about efficiency before “it was cool.” The timing was right for the ad campaign.

- 3) The Certified Hereford Beef program has opened doors. Before this program, end-product premiums for Hereford cattle were hard to come by.
- 4) Disposition, which has always been popular, is being talked about more than ever; and Herefords excel for this trait.
- 5) For many commercial herds, producers needed to look beyond

Angus because the make-up of their commercial cows has become nearly 100% Angus.

- 6) The black baldie cow is still recognized as a good one.

NAAB reports that 48,727 units of Hereford semen were sold in the U.S. in 2008, and 95,126 units were sold to foreign markets. NAAB data shows a dramatic increase in Hereford international semen sales since 2005. Likewise domestic sales have steadily increased (see Figure 1).

This year's report and those from previous years can be viewed on the NAAB's electronic resource guide at www.naab-css.org/sales/.

Chad Ellingson, Genex/Cooperative Resources International beef sire procurement manager, says during the first five months of 2009, Genex experienced an increase in Hereford semen sales. “We attribute this to commercial cattlemen's desire to produce black baldie females, which are known for their maternal efficiencies. I also believe an increase in semen sales is due partially to Hereford breeders focusing on producing more balanced-trait cattle that work well in the real world.”

Genex currently has 17 active Hereford bulls in its lineup. “We are starting to see a couple Hereford bulls make it in our top 10 semen sales bulls for the company,” Ellingson says. “This would be a change from the past.”

Ellingson says the balanced-trait cattle he is seeing more of in the Hereford breed are the ones that are suitable to use on commercial heifers while having the performance to compete amongst the best cattle in the industry. “Most importantly,” he adds about the new Herefords, “they have the structural integrity to produce females that add to the bottom line of cow-calf producers, for they possess longevity, fertility and productive eliteness.”

Don Trimmer, Accelerated Genetics director of beef programs, says, “Currently we are seeing demand for semen on Hereford sires steady with

last year's numbers. In 2008 we were up 5% overall in Hereford semen sales, led by a strong demand in the international market.

“Though sales are similar compared to last year, we have seen a 40% increase in domestic sales compared to five years ago,” Trimmer adds. “This increase has allowed us to add additional bulls to our lineup for our customers.”

Currently Accelerated Genetics markets seven Hereford sires.

“In my opinion the increased demand for Hereford semen as reflected by NAAB data can be attributed to a number of factors,” Trimmer says. “First, we are seeing the increased usage of AI by Hereford breeders. Second, more high-profile, proven sires are entering AI studs. Remember that NAAB numbers only reflect the sales by AI organizations. They do not include breeder-to-breeder sales.

“Third, when the market gets tough, producers re-evaluate their operations and look for ways to increase their profit potential. Cattlemen understand the value of heterosis. Hereford bulls are going onto Angus-based cows to increase pounds of calves produced and improve fertility in their cow herd.” **HW**

Figure 1: Hereford semen sales 2003-2008

