



Focus On Disposition

Prior to the Strategic Planning Meeting this past spring, the American Hereford Association (AHA) did a survey of commercial cattlemen to ask several questions and one of them was “What traits are most important to you when selecting a bull?” Calving ease was still at the top of the list, but the one trait that made its way quickly up the list was disposition.

As our clients get a little older and busier with other businesses and, quite frankly, because it has other implications, convenience traits like disposition become paramount. The positive from this is that commercial cattlemen, while addressing disposition look to the Hereford breed.

We continue to get reports from our research projects that prove that

adding some Hereford genetics to a cow herd will help with disposition. As Mark Akin, Circle A Ranch general manager, explains, “Our staff has really liked the disposition of the Hereford-sired cattle. They are easy to work around.”

It has always been recognized that Hereford cattle are inherently quiet, but even with this known fact, we also need to realize that there can and will be differences within the breed.

Disposition is considered a behavioral trait. Important behaviors to beef cattle production include reactions to processing through a chute, maternal instincts at calving, and newborn calf vigor. Disposition is probably the most important of the behavioral traits because it affects a variety of things including performance, health and handling equipment needs.

Disposition, by most thoughts, can be considered as how easily animals respond to routine management practices such as treatment and handling. Because of this trait's importance, the AHA will begin to collect data on disposition starting this fall. You will find a column on your weaning sheet that will allow you to give animals a chute score at weaning. If you have already registered your calves and

have the weaning sheets in hand, you may contact the AHA customer service department to request a new form with this column added. If you do your work online, then you will be able to download the updated forms for weaning this fall.

The scoring system (adopted by the Beef Improvement Federation [BIF] and found in the BIF guidelines) provided below is designed to subjectively evaluate difference in disposition when animals are processed through the chute.

As always, do not get too caught up in the definitions of each of the scores. We are most concerned about the differences in the cattle. We have already begun to collect these scores on some of our National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) test cattle and the more data we can get, the quicker when can prove the inherent disposition of Hereford cattle and find the genetic differences within the breed. **HW**

BIF disposition scoring

Score 1-Docile. Mild disposition. Gentle and easily handled. Stands and moves slowly during processing. Undisturbed, settled, somewhat dull. Does not pull on headgate when in chute. Exits chute calmly.

Score 2-Restless. Quieter than average, but may be stubborn during processing. May try to back out of chute or pull back on headgate. Some flicking of tail. Exits chute promptly.

Score 3-Nervous. Typical temperament is manageable, but nervous and impatient. A moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking. Repeated pushing and pulling on headgate. Exits chute briskly.

Score 4-Flight (Wild). Jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently. May bellow and froth at the mouth. Continuous tail flicking. Defecates and urinates during processing. Frantically runs fence line and may jump when penned individually. Exhibits long flight distance and exits chute wildly.

Score 5-Aggressive. May be similar to Score 4, but with added aggressive behavior, fearfulness, extreme agitation and continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while in chute. Exits chute frantically and may exhibit attack behavior when handled alone.

Score 6 – Very Aggressive. Extremely aggressive temperament. Thrashes about or attacks wildly when confined in small, tight places. Pronounced attack behavior. **HW**