



20-Year Look at Hereford Success Drivers

The recent growth of Hereford bull market share in the commercial cow-calf industry is an interesting phenomenon with historic importance. Going back to the breed's earliest importation, the old iconic Hereford beef breed has maintained its historic genetic traits with a few retooled modifications due to modern science and selection.

Hardiness, range toughness, mother ability, sustainability and feed efficiency are all traits that the breed has been recognized for now going on three centuries. History has documented that the Hereford breed has always been a cost reducer. The beef industry, however, has not always required that cost reduction be a necessary component to profitability when, for a long time, inputs were so cheap.

Today, times have changed dramatically from the \$2 corn days, and with the times, the Hereford breed, along with the people who have maintained these pedigrees, have also adapted.

A review of recent history outlines key events that have attributed to the resurrected popularity of the Hereford breed. Going back 20 years, there were key Association decisions, industry trends and economic pressures that have brought back a rise in the demand and necessity of the Hereford breed of cattle.

We have identified 12 events that have shaped and influenced both the direction and current market share of the Hereford breed and the American Hereford Association (AHA).

1) 1990 Colorado State

University (CSU)/Montfort Hereford study – Led by world renowned meat scientist Gary Smith, this three-year study, known at the time as the largest beef breed study of its kind, defined the Hereford breed in terms of consumer acceptance and overall quality of Hereford beef. It documented the performance and feed efficiency of the breed and led to the eventual specification development of Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®).

2) 1993 North American Cattle

Evaluation (NACE) established – The combining of performance databases from both the American and Canadian Hereford Associations led to a single North American evaluation where cattle from each country could compare with one another for genetic merit. Having similar expected progeny difference (EPD) benchmarks opened trade and enhanced the

reliability of North American EPDs. Eventually NACE led to the recent development of the Pan-American Cattle Evaluation, bringing in two additional populations of Hereford cattle from Uruguay and Argentina, making the Hereford genetic evaluation a global effort.

3) 1993 Genetic Outreach Program

– The Genetic Outreach Program (GOP) was established immediately following the results of the CSU Hereford study, allowing breeders to follow cattle through the feeding and packing phase and assessing the economic value of their cattle through to the end product. This program marked a renewed interest and commitment in improving the end product quality and feedlot profitability of Hereford genetics and was a true eye-opener into the strengths and weaknesses of the breed at the time.

4) 1994 adoption of carcass

ultrasound technology – AHA's adoption of ultrasound technology and carcass EPDs utilizing carcass ultrasound measurements in an effort to better meet market signals in the commercial sector sparked a renewed commitment toward end product quality.

5) 1995 merger of American Hereford Association and American Polled Hereford Association (APHA)

– After decades of separation, AHA Executive Secretary H.H. "Hop" Dickenson and APHA Executive Secretary Ed Bible rallied their respective boards and membership to approve the amalgamation of the two organizations, building the synergy required to make joint improvements in the breed and in the associations' membership programs. Although a very difficult task, the combining of the associations eventually led to the crossing of the horned and polled lines and other strategic decisions to position the breed in a more commercial direction and to take advantage of a much larger combined population of genetics.

6) 1995 Certified Hereford Beef

launched – The biggest complaint of Hereford breeders in the mid-1990s was the indiscriminant discounting of straight Hereford feeder cattle in much of the country. Packer signals for larger exotic cattle or straight black cattle dampened the market picture for

Hereford feeders. The start-up of CHB under Red Oak Farms, then later the licensing of both Greater Omaha Packing Co. LLC and National Beef Packing Co. positioned the AHA squarely in the commercial beef industry. Field service personnel were redirected to work with feedlots and commercial bull buyers. Today, more than 3 million Hereford cattle have been harvested through the program, and Hereford feeder cattle now command top bidding.

7) 1998 National Reference Sire

Program established – As a collaborator with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Carcass Merit Project, the AHA established breeding test herds that later became the National Reference Sire Program (NRSP), also known as the Young Sire Test program. In the last decade, the NRSP has evolved into a dynamic program characterizing the economically relevant traits of the top sires in the country. Furthermore, by utilizing the data from the structured evaluation, the AHA is now positioned as a leader in genomic discovery, which shows real promise in the future.

8) 2000 commitment to whole herd

reporting – The commitment of reporting the production, defect rate, fertility and disposal of every registered female in the Hereford breed has created one of the world's largest databases of economic importance within the seedstock industry. Today, more than 3.5 million cow records are utilized to develop EPDs in areas of novel importance and to correct stereotypic defects that once negatively affected the perception of the breed.

9) State sanctioned special

feeder calf sales – Due to the relationships with feeders across the Midwest as a result of CHB, Hereford breeders, beginning in Kansas and then expanding to other areas of the country including Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, South Dakota, Montana and Missouri, have taken matters into their own hands to package Hereford feeder cattle and began planning state sanctioned special feeder calf sales. This endeavor has had an enormous impact on the value perception and true feedlot value discovery of Hereford feeder cattle in real world commercial conditions.

10) Increased use of AI and ET

– Beginning at the 2002 Hereford Direction Summit in Stillwater, Okla., Hereford breeders were encouraged to utilize highly proven bulls in artificial insemination (AI) programs in an effort to build consistency in the breed and a reliable breed trend. Today the breed has moved from 12% of registrations being AI or embryo transfer (ET) calves to nearly 25% of the population utilizing the technology, a 100% increase. The commitment toward proven genetics has had a radical impact on the genetic trends of the breed, and now bull studs are aggressively purchasing and merchandising Hereford semen within the commercial sector.

11) Radical escalation of input cost

– The recent explosion of the grain market, in particular the cost of corn now at more than \$7 per bushel, is creating a new mindset among American cattlemen and cattle feeders. Driven by global fuel demands, the rising cost of oil and gas and the subsequent U.S. renewable fuel policy have driven upward of 45% of the nation's corn crop to the ethanol industry. These volatile inputs costs have forced cattlemen to utilize every tool in their arsenal including Hereford efficiency traits in combination with planned crossbreeding.

12) Increased demand for Hereford bulls on Angus cows

– The overwhelming popularity of Angus genetics in the nation's cow herd due to packer marketing programs has created a cow herd base made up primarily of Angus genetics. Because of the Hereford breed's complementarity and the proven heterosis advantages that Hereford bulls breed into their progeny, black baldie calves are becoming the standard bearer of quality within the industry.

For more information regarding the power of Hereford genetics in crossbreeding programs or if you are looking for Hereford range bulls, contact your local Hereford breeder or AHA field representative to steer you in the right direction. The time is now for taking advantage of the tried and true Hereford breed. **HW**