

# HEREFORD WORLD

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# Hereford Innovator

*Stahly Ranch has been a leader in young sire testing since 1999.*

by Jennifer Carrico

In east central South Dakota, raising good cattle and good children are important to the Stahly family. As the sixth generation helps on Stahly Ranch, they find new ways to make their cattle better as well as find ways to help other cattle producers.

The Stahly Ranch — which is run by Mike and Judy Stahly, their son, Doug, his wife, Chris, and their sons, Spencer, Mason and Nolan — was the recipient of the 2013 American Hereford Association (AHA) Innovator Award.

The Stahlys have a 450-head commercial cow-calf operation near Cavour, S.D. They maintain about 150 Hereford cows, 100 Angus cows and 200 baldie cows.

The Stahlys were recognized during the 2013 National Western Stock Show Hereford Carload and Pen Show in Denver for their commitment to the National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) and testing young Hereford bulls.

### Testing Hereford bulls

“When we started helping with this program (NRSP) in 1999, it wasn’t a whole lot different than what we were already doing,” Mike says. “We continued to AI

(artificial insemination) cows and then sent the steer calves to a feedlot to be tested for different traits.”

AHA Chief Operating Officer and Director of Breed Improvement Jack Ward says the NRSP started in 1998 because the AHA wanted to participate in the Carcass Merit Project which looked at meat quality and tenderness. The project was funded by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and some beef checkoff dollars.

“Mike Stahly and others bred cows to Hereford sires for this project, and then it springboarded after that as a young sire evaluation,” Jack explains.

### Their program

Mike’s great-grandfather, who was the first homesteader in Beadle County, started the ranch. The current Stahly herd was started as a commercial Hereford herd in the 1970s by Mike’s father.

Through the years, Stahlys have experimented with some crossbreeding. They started by crossing the Hereford cows with Angus. In the late 1970s, they brought in some continental breeds but later returned to the Hereford-Angus combination, as the baldie cows have always been a great type of cow for their ranch and environmental conditions.

The Stahlys calve from mid-March until the first part of May. They like to be done with AI by July 3 so that the cows aren’t calving for a long period of time.

### How NRSP works

Each year, prior to breeding season, the Stahlys select three to six young Hereford bulls from the list provided to them by the AHA.

“Various breeders nominate bulls for this sire evaluation to be tested in real-world commercial settings. We select the ones we want to use based

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Since 1999 the Stahlys have reported data on 1,187 calves representing 45 sires through AHA’s National Reference Sire Program.



on the information sent to us on the bulls,” says Mike. “Since these are young sires, it’s sometimes difficult to get the amount of semen needed for the program and we have to use an alternate bull.”

He says one of the bulls is used in common with other test herds in order to link all of the NRSP herds together, which makes the information even more meaningful.

Stahlys randomly select about 60 cows to be bred to each bull they are testing. They do not AI virgin heifers or first-calf heifers, so those females are not part of the NRSP program.

Cows are heat detected twice per day and sorted once per day.

“When it comes to AI time, the entire family gets involved,” Mike explains. “Judy does a lot of our heat checking and Doug and his boys are horseback sorting cows that need to be bred. It also gives Mason a good chance to break colts to be used on the ranch.”

After the females are bred, cows are sorted into groups of 100 to 140 head, and four bulls are turned out with a group. Angus bulls are turned out on the red cows, and Hereford bulls are turned out on the Angus cows in order to produce the baldie calves.

NRSP test herds maintain breeding data, birth weights and birth dates, as well as weaning data. The rest of the data for the program are collected at the feedyard while the steers are on test and then at the harvest facility where the steers are harvested.

Jack says the goals of the program are to identify young sires, compared to some high accuracy reference sires within the Hereford breed.

“The test is structured and the minimum number of cows bred to each sire participating is 60. The progeny of these sires will be measured at all levels of production including birth, weaning, yearling, and the steers will be fed in a GrowSafe feedyard and real carcass measurements taken. All data collected will be used in national



Mike and Judy Stahly of Stahly Ranch, Cavour, S.D., were honored with a Hereford Innovator Award for Stahly Ranch’s commitment to the Hereford industry and the National Reference Sire Program. Pictured (l to r) are: Cliff Copeland, AHA president; Judy and Mike Stahly; and Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president.

cattle evaluation, and over the past few years, DNA has been collected on all progeny to be used for current and future AHA genomic training and validation,” Jack explains.

### The benefits

Mike says the Stahlys benefit greatly as part of this program and also help other cattle producers to know what they are producing.

All male calves on the ranch are castrated in order to get proper measurements for the program. All of the Stahlys work together on the farm year-round to collect the data needed for the program.

While they are provided the semen on the bulls to be tested at no cost, the other costs for the animals are their responsibility, including vaccinations, feed and other normal cattle costs.

In the end, steer calves are sent to a cooperating feedlot in Nebraska, which feeds out all the steers in the NRSP program. The rest of the steers are sent to be finished at Haverhals Feedlot Inc. in southeast South Dakota. Stahlys sell half to a repeat customer and retain half interest in the calves.

“By now a large percent of our cow herd is heifers retained from the NRSP program and it is interesting to see how our bull-bred calves do compared to the program calves,” Mike says.



Each year the Stahlys breed 60 cows to each bull they are testing.

Mike adds one of the best benefits of the program is that they are able to keep the heifers to put back into the herd as replacements. Some heifers are marketed at the sale barn in Huron, S.D., in early March.

The Stahlys raise enough feed — corn and hay — to supply the need at their ranch. Calves are weaned in late October in three groups, with the oldest calves weaned first. All calves are then

backgrounded at the ranch and sent to the feedlot in mid-February.

Jack says feed intake information is collected on the NRSP steers sent to Olsen Ranch in Nebraska.

“Remember, the other interesting part of this test is that the contemporary groups stay together throughout harvest so the data is based on nice-sized and very clean groups,” Jack says.

Through the NRSP, the Stahlys have tested about three new sires each year, resulting in about 80 to 100 calves annually. Through the years, they have reported data on 1,187 calves representing 45 sires.

According to Jack, the plan is to continue the NRSP program for young sire evaluation as well as for the collection of DNA as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) feed efficiency grant project.

“These cattle are being used to build a nice training population for Hereford genomic tests and to identify markers that can help predict feed intake,” concludes Jack.

At the Stahly Ranch, they plan to continue to be involved in the NRSP since it is not only a benefit to their operation but also a benefit to many other cattle producers across the country. **HW**



The Stahly family (pictured, l to r) are: Mike, Judy, Mason, Nolan, Chris and Doug. Not pictured is Spencer.



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