



Utilize Technology to Find the “Good Ones”

It has been a little more than a year since the American Hereford Association (AHA) introduced the Hereford Verified program. The purpose of the program is to get Hereford-sired cattle marketed through a program that pays cattlemen bonuses for high-quality, verified cattle.

Another goal for the program is to be able to track Hereford genetics. Since inception there has been nearly 170 cattlemen sign up to participate in the program, more than 17,000 cattle enrolled and nearly 6,000 harvested. These are fairly moderate numbers, but considering the value of feeder cattle, I think this is somewhat impressive for a new program. More importantly, from a breed improvement standpoint, the individual data that has come back from this program gives us a good snapshot of what is happening.

In past columns I have wrote about genetic trends in the Hereford breed and what we need to do as a population to make forward strides. Sometimes we can see this a little more clearly with the data that comes

in from harvested cattle. Hereford Verified data will give us a clearer picture of where we are and how we compare to the industry.

Let's recap how producers can collect bonuses through Hereford Verified. Remember that in the second year of participation cattle must grade 60% Choice. When we look at the cattle harvested to date, we are less than 50% Choice. This number is not far off of where the industry is at, but it does remind us that we could do some work in this area.

Evaluating data

This past summer Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC, with the help of National Beef Packing Co. LLC (a CHB packer), collected ribeye areas (REA) on more than 100,000 carcasses. Right now technology is not advanced enough to capture intramuscular fat (%IMF). On the more than 100,000 carcasses, the average size was 13.5 square inches with 95% of the REA between 10.5 and 16.5.

This is real data that can be used to strengthen the belief in genetic trends.

As we have mentioned in the past, the genetic trend for %IMF has not changed the past 10 years and the REA genetic trend has had a nice general increase. The real data backs this up and reminds us that we still have some work to do, but the tools are in place to make the necessary changes.

All we need to do is look at the correlation between real carcass and ultrasound data. These two are correlated at nearly 80% and the heritability of carcass traits is high. So the bottom line is that we can make genetic change in carcass traits by finding the good ones through the use of ultrasound technology.

Even more exciting is the data that shows Hereford breeders are utilizing this technology more and more each year. More than 60% of the yearling weights submitted to the AHA are submitted with ultrasound measurements.

Real-world success

Just a few days ago, I had a breeder in my office who was reflecting on some of the carcass information he had collected the past few years. He shared with me that they have had tremendous success for several years with cattle grading nearly 100% Choice with a high percentage Prime.

This is even more impressive when you consider that they have had few Yield Grade 4s. This is a real-life story and the bottom line is that there are genetics in the Hereford breed that can make the changes we desire.

We obviously need to continue to work in areas to improve the genetic trends within the breed. But always keep in mind the basics and answer the call of your customers. Hereford cattle offer a great deal to the cattle industry and it is up to each of us to move the breed in the right direction.

Join us

Lastly, I would like to invite everyone to be with us in Kansas City on Saturday morning, Oct. 21, for the breeders' forum during the AHA Annual Meeting. The session will include important performance issues. For more information about the Annual Meeting, see page 18. Hope to see you there. **HW**