

# What's Our Grade?



Jack Ward

Every few weeks my wife and I wait in anticipation for the report cards to see how both of our boys are progressing in their school work. These are always anxious times around our household and the message Mary Ann and I try to tell the boys is to do their work and try their best.

In the spring of 2005 the American Hereford Association (AHA) put together a Strategic Plan that will continue to give the staff and Board direction for the next few years. For a copy of the plan, see the November 2005 *Hereford World* or visit [www.hereford.org](http://www.hereford.org).

As an Association we can now begin to reflect and give ourselves an evaluation of how we are progressing. It is always interesting when you grade yourself; the key is to be honest and fair. I would like to look specifically at the performance-related issues and address some of the positives and not so positives. Let's take a look at Core Strategy 3: Increase the quality, consistency and reliability of Hereford genetics.

**Objective 1: Identify, compile and quantify data to improve measurements in fertility.** We are currently working on research in cooperation with Dan Moser, Kansas State University associate professor, with financial support from the beef consortium, to look at ways to measure fertility more accurately.

The Hereford database was chosen for this research because Hereford breeders adopted a whole herd

performance system that gives a true reading of performance as well as reasons for animal disposal. Moser gave a nice review of the progress in this area during the Annual Meeting.

I would say we could give our efforts in this area a C+. This means we are doing the work, but we haven't yet completed the task.

**Objective 2: Identify and compile data to quantify the feedlot and carcass performance of Hereford cattle.** In the last few months we have made a great deal of progress in this area with the help of Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC and Hereford Verified.

Nearly 6,000 head of cattle have been harvested through Hereford Verified and the conclusions have been, that as a population, we could work on marbling and yield grade.

Obviously the marbling issue goes hand in hand with the genetic trend information we see in our purebred cattle. On a positive note, the yield grade issue looks to be improving through the increase in ribeye area. This also is backed up by the genetic trend information. As an industry, we all need to be concerned with the latest Beef Quality Audit (BQA) information that shows we are not gaining any ground on marbling and we have lost ground on yield. This could be somewhat of a monster created by demand, price and management.

I am excited about the projects we have started throughout the country. These projects involve large commercial herds and are testing Hereford genetics next to other breeds. As we approach these operations, the main theme heard from all is that they need genetics

that provide positive calving ease, adequate growth, quality udders, adequate carcass traits, good disposition, efficiency and longevity. Some of these traits are easy to quantify and predict, such as calving ease, growth and carcass. Through Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) information, we can give some valuable information on udder quality, disposition and longevity. We believe efficiency is a Hereford strong suit, but need structured tests to verify anecdotal evidence. The AHA is beginning a research study with the University of Missouri-Columbia in this area. There are other institutions working on ways to measure efficiency that should provide a great deal of valuable information as well.

For Objective 2 I think we could give ourselves a B at this point with the understanding that we could lose that grade in a hurry if we do not stay focused. The pieces are in place to make tremendous strides in these areas.

**Objective 3: Increase the collection of data among Hereford breeders.** We have seen a significant increase in data collection. Obviously Hereford breeders are doing a good job of collecting weights on calves. At the same time, we do need to see an increase in ultrasound, cow weights, body condition scores and udder scores. We do see an increase each year in these areas, but we have some pretty lofty goals and if we get this data, we will be able to use this in more research and provide breeders with stronger and more accurate tools to make selections.

We are still using the Hereford 101s as a tool to get these messages out. In the

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Strategic Plan Report Card	
Name: American Hereford Association	
Date: November 2006	
SUBJECT: Core Strategy 3: Increase the quality, consistency and reliability of Hereford genetics	
OBJECTIVE	GRADE
Identify, compile and quantify data to improve measurements in fertility.	C+
Identify and compile data to quantify the feedlot and carcass performance of Hereford cattle.	B
Increase the collection of data among Hereford breeders.	C
Continue to promote the use of artificial insemination (AI) across the breed.	C
Take advantage of validated new forms of technology.	B
Overall Grade	Pass
Comments: Keep working and studying, and set a goal to earn straight A's by 2010.	

spring we started the online Hereford 101s, allowing us to capture a larger audience from around the country.

I would say we deserve a C for this objective, but also understand that progress can be made quickly.

**Objective 4: Continue to promote the use of artificial insemination (AI) across the breed.** We are growing our reference sire herds rapidly and getting them started in different regions of the country. This should continue to find young bulls within the breed that can make significant contributions as AI sires. Major bull studs are actively researching the database and contacting breeders about potentially buying or leasing Hereford bulls.

Contacts have been made with leaders in other countries to continue our research with American Hereford genetics worldwide and we are seeing progress in the development of the Pan-American and global evaluations. With this said, we need to understand that other countries are already using AI heavily and collecting data to prove their genetics. We must continue to encourage the use of proven genetics to gain our share of the worldwide market. With this goal in mind, the AHA has adopted the Non-Certificate AI Sire program, which allows

breeders to register calves without an AI certificate.

In some areas of this objective we could give ourselves a B and in some areas we deserve a D, so a C would be appropriate.

**Objective 5: Take advantage of validated new forms of technology.** We are working hand in hand with various DNA companies to validate the use of different DNA markers in the Hereford breed. We are also giving support to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) bovine genome project.

I would give us a B in this area, knowing that this is one of the fastest moving parts of the beef industry.

### **Overall grade**

Well, overall we have a passing grade at this point. With the same encouragement I give my sons, I hope that Hereford breeders continue to remind AHA staff and Board members to keep working and studying. The future is bright for the Hereford breed and its members; let's set a goal to earn straight A's by 2010.

Keep watching for announcements about upcoming online Hereford 101s that are scheduled for Nov. 30 and Dec. 14. **HW**