



Lee Haygood

Making a Comeback

By day, he works in town for a money management firm. But after hours (and often before), you can find him working to rebuild one of the most distinguished Hereford herds in the country.

by Katrina Waters

It doesn't take long to pick up on Lee Haygood's passion for the cattle industry — or his determination to successfully rebuild the seedstock operation his late father, Wayne, first managed in the 1960s, when it was Indian Mound Farm in New Harmony, Ind.

"I grew up in a Hereford family," Haygood says, right off the bat. "In the '70s, I would say my dad was probably the leading marketer of Hereford genetics in the country. He kind of innovated semen sales, had a lot of good

foreign markets and sold cattle coast to coast."

Haygood grew up showing Herefords all over the country, and his dad judged shows around the world.

"Dad was in the real heyday of Herefords," Haygood says. "He was also in a time that was really fun because they got to pioneer a lot of the performance records. And he started doing embryo transplanting in the late '70s, when it was still a surgical procedure. He was in the business in a time when we were having a lot of technological advances, and

he was right there at the head of all of them."

In 1981 the Haygoods moved back to Lee's mother's family ranch in Canadian, Texas, (about 100 miles northeast of Amarillo) and formed Indian Mound Ranch, bringing with them all of the females that were 2 years old and younger. About 10 years later, Wayne was battling cancer, and Lee left his job with the American Hereford Association (AHA) in Kansas City to help manage the ranch. When his dad passed away in 2002, they dispersed the herd to settle the business.

"Bullish" on Herefords

As Lee Haygood retires from the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board this month, he says he thinks the breed is currently in one of the strongest positions of all breeds in the cattle industry.

"I'm bullish on Herefords," he says. "As a breed we can gain market share based on the current needs of the industry. High inputs can be a reason why we [Hereford breeders] again become a big player in the industry; it can be a positive.

"Right now agriculture is faced with rising costs in every sector," he adds. "The beef cattle industry as a whole needs to learn to be more efficient, which is the Hereford breed's strong suit. Now is the time to let beef producers know we have the most efficient breed of cattle and breed of choice to increase efficiency and reduce costs."

Moving forward

"We have moved ahead with several projects that continue to document the valuable traits of Hereford genetics," Haygood explains. "Research and development projects like the Harris heterosis project and the feed efficiency trials with the University of Missouri and Circle A are taking tremendously good steps in documenting Hereford efficiency. We can use the information to market the breed."

Thanks to the Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program, the Association is getting close to releasing a stayability or fertility expected progeny difference (EPD). "Scientists like Dan Moser are very complimentary of our data set," Haygood says. "The data we collect is the highest quality of any breed. Our continued collection of data is making it possible for us to move forward to develop a stayability or fertility EPD."

Another strategy the staff and Board have worked on is to increase artificial insemination (AI) use. Haygood says since the strategic planning session in 2004, the breed has experienced a 12.2% increase in AI use.

Haygood says another thing that is important to note is in order to increase profitability, AHA's subsidiary, American Beef Records Association (ABRA), now offers registration services to other breeds. "This venture has turned out to be successful, and we will continue to grow that side of the business," Haygood says. "ABRA allows us to utilize staff skills and talents and provide services to other breeds. It doesn't detract from AHA customer service, and it is a way to add revenue."

Facing challenges

As a result of the increased costs in agriculture, the AHA experienced a decrease in registrations this year. "The budget is an extreme challenge, and it will continue

But some tough choices had to be made. Would Haygood continue to ranch? Would he stay in Canadian? He and his wife, Jacqui, were newlyweds at the time, and she was an associate professor of agricultural communications at Texas Tech University.

But they made the decision to live in Canadian and ranch.

"It was a big decision for Jacqui to leave Tech. And there were several things that were difficult. But we made that decision, and we moved back here, and I got a job," Haygood says.

In addition to ranching, he works from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day for Abraham Trading Co. in Canadian, where he started as a trader but now focuses on real estate and other special projects. Jacqui teaches English and journalism at Canadian High School.

"We basically have poured every extra ounce of time and resources into the ranch. And, of

course, like any rancher, at times you wonder how intelligent that is. But I think, like all ranchers, we love the business," he says.

The couple also sees the ranching lifestyle as a great environment to raise their two sons, Luke, 4, and Mark, 1.

Functional, fault-free and reproductive

The couple purchased 13 cows in the dispersal sale, hand-picked from favorite cow families, and has been working to rebuild Indian Mound Ranch ever since. The herd is up to about 80 registered Hereford cows and Haygood projects being in the 150-cow range within the next three to four years.

But don't think they are just adding numbers for the sake of adding numbers — Haygood has set high standards for the cattle that stick around.

"To be a cow at Indian Mound Ranch, you really can't make a



The Haygood family: Jacqui, Mark, Lee and Luke.

mistake. Because if you make a mistake, you're going to be gone," Haygood says. "We've established that we're going to raise cattle that are functional, fault-free and reproductive."

Performance records are also of importance to Haygood. He says Indian Mound Ranch is one of the few herds in

continued on page 36...

to be a challenge to keep all our programs going if registrations continue to decrease," Haygood says. "Just like everyone's home operation, the Board is facing increased costs and decreased revenue and working to figure out how to keep our programs at current levels."

Haygood says another challenge facing the industry is DNA technology and how to utilize it as a breed association. "The Board will continually be challenged with new DNA technology," Haygood says. "More and more agricultural companies are getting in the business of DNA and are all actively pursuing different traits in cattle. As an Association, we have to stay abreast of the different technologies and figure out how to validate that information and, if it is good data, then figure out how to incorporate it in the breed improvement program."

Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement, says it has been a pleasure to work with Haygood. "Through Lee's leadership, we have worked on some very tough issues and developed some great programs," Ward says. "With his support, we changed the carcass EPDs; we have developed comprehensive research projects on documenting the value of Hereford cattle in crossbreeding programs and residual feed intake. We also developed sire recognition programs."

Bragging rights

"It's hard not to brag about our youth programs and the tremendous job the youth in our breed do at promoting Hereford cattle," Haygood says. "All a person has to do is look at the activity of junior members and all of their good programs. We still arguably have the best junior program in the industry; this fact is extremely positive for the breed."

While on the Board, Haygood has served on the breed improvement, show and finance committees and was chairman of the breed improvement committee for three years. He is a big believer in and promoter of the value of performance data and breed improvement programs. He served on the committee that established the Whole Herd TPR program, which was implemented Jan. 1, 2001.

"Our breeders' input to the whole herd system and their willingness to turn in the info makes it so much easier for us at the AHA to tell the good story of Hereford," he explains. "The program adds strength to the Hereford breed. It helps build the case for 'why' Hereford — why Herefords are the best option."

— Angie Stump Denton



Haygood prefers working cattle horseback. "I always will. I've got a lot of friends on four-wheelers, but I just like a good horse," he says.

Texas that is a Gold Total Performance Records (TPR) herd, a designation AHA has for herds that collect and record all of the measurements possible.

He says they still use artificial insemination and do embryo transplants — not only to have access to the best genetics but also to do what they can to get their best genetics out there.

"We haven't been in the showing, so some people might think that we're not as active," Haygood says. "But, really, for the program that we're trying to do right now, we have just been working hard the last five or six years to build the base for what we think is going to be a really good cow herd to produce bulls for our commercial customers. That's kind of where all of our energy has gone."

Herefords: Better than ever

Following in his dad's footsteps, Haygood is actively involved in Hereford associations, both on the state and national level. He is in the final year of his four-year term on the AHA Board and previously served as president of the Texas Hereford Association. During the AHA media day last fall, he made the comment that he believed today's Herefords are better than ever.

Haygood adds, "I know we had some things that needed to be fixed in the Hereford breed, and I think you'll find most of the Hereford breeders who are left in the business

have addressed those issues. I know we have here. That's why we've got a very strict culling program, where we just won't allow those problems to exist.

"I think Hereford breeders today are much more critical of problems because I think — and a lot of these are the same breeders — we just can't tolerate those problems because our customers aren't going to tolerate those problems and they've got somewhere else to go.

"As Hereford breeders, we've got another shot at a lot of our old customers to come back at some point. But they have to be happy with our product. When they come back — maybe it's been 20 years since they've used a Hereford bull — I think we have to put a Hereford bull into their herd that they are going to be really happy with. I just don't think we've got room for error."

He speaks with excitement about the future of Herefords, including a still-in-development stayability expected progeny difference (EPD), which he sees as a figure that could be quite helpful, especially to the commercial producer.

A high stayability number would be representative of a bull's daughters staying in the herd longer, whereas a lower number would mean the daughters are not staying around as long.

"I think a commercial producer could quickly look at the number and say, 'This bull has a lot of longevity in his line' or 'This bull

must have some problems; they aren't staying around,'" he says.

Priority shift

Haygood says now that he works both on and off the ranch, he can better relate to many of his customers who are in the same situation — and it has caused him to adjust some of his priorities accordingly.

Like many of his customers, he no longer has the luxury to check heifers every hour of the day.

"My heifers have to calve," he says. "If I lose the calf, I am very likely to lose the heifer because I am not here to fix it."

The job in town also caused him to adjust calving season to begin in March versus January or February. "I need the longer days," he says. "In January and February, I'd be checking them all by headlight. In March, I get some daylight — not a lot of daylight, but I get enough to make the run, and I can tag and tattoo calves and weigh them and still make my feed run and finish right at dark."

The heifers are not the only ones who have to be low-maintenance at Indian Mound Ranch. Haygood prides himself in raising range-ready bulls. Before they are sold at about 18 months, the only developing they get is grazing on wheat pasture and getting some cubes.

"That's my whole advertisement — they are range-ready," he says. "They are in great shape."

"We don't get many of them back, and that is very important to me. You don't want to see them coming home. That's not very profitable. The more feed, the more problems..."

Haygood sells his bulls private treaty in the late summer and fall but hopes to reinstate the annual bull sale within the next few years, once he can put 50 to 75 bulls in the sale.

In the meantime, when he's not in the office, it's likely you'll find him on the ranch, strategically rebuilding the herd. **HW**

Editor's Note: Reprint courtesy of The Cattleman.