

Serving the Breed

With honesty and optimism, the 2013 AHA President Cliff Copeland has taken a balanced approach to service by not focusing on just one program.

by **Angie Stump Denton**



“Demand for our breed is as high as it has been in over 30 years. We have been rediscovered as a great choice to get a hybrid vigor boost out of the nation’s predominately black cow herd and not lose carcass merit in doing so.”

When you attend your first Hereford show and sale when you are 3 weeks old, you are destined to do great things in the Hereford breed. It’s in your blood.

There’s no doubt that Cliff Copeland, Nara Visa, N.M., has spent his lifetime serving the Hereford breed: first in the junior ranks and most recently retiring on Nov. 2 from his year of service as president of the American Hereford Association (AHA). He is the first to serve as president of both the junior and adult organizations.

“I was extremely humbled to serve as AHA president,” Cliff says. “I hope the membership thinks I have been open, receptive and responsive to all questions and complaints and that I’ve taken a balanced approach to shows, performance and promotion.”

Cliff co-manages Copeland and Sons LLC with his wife, Pat; his parents, Clifford and Barbara; and Cliff and Pat’s son and daughter-in-law, Matt and Kyla.

Copeland and Sons was established in 1943 with cattle as its sole business. Herefords have been the foundation of the Copeland program since inception, with the first registered Herefords being purchased in 1947. For more history about the ranch, see, “About the ranch” on Page 25.

Today the Copeland 500-head herd includes 90 registered Hereford females, 80 cows used to produce club calves and 330 commercial Hereford cows.

“The commercial cows are a test herd for our registered herd,” Cliff explains. “We have not bought any bulls to use in the commercial herd since 1947. We test our own genetics to make sure they will work for our customers.”

Growing up

During his youth, Cliff was an active member of the American Junior Hereford Association (AJHA), serving on its board and as president in 1976.

“Participating in junior Hereford

activities to me was worth more than a college education,” Cliff explains.

He recalls the opportunity to meet Hereford breeders from across the country as well as to travel to different ranches and learn about their programs.

Cliff graduated from New Mexico State University with a bachelor’s degree in animal science. His first job after college was serving as herdsman at 26 Bar Ranch in Arizona, owned by John Wayne and Louis Johnson. He was then hired as manager of the Doolittle Hereford Ranch, Watrous, N.M.

In 1978 he married Pat, and in 1983, when their son, Matt, was born, the couple moved back to the Copeland ranch and joined the family operation.

“Everything we have and the success of the ranch today is because of the tenacity Mom and Dad had

continued on page 24...

With adequate rain the region’s “short grass” can be exceptionally strong, and world-class gains can be achieved.



Copeland replacement heifers are bred to Angus bulls to produce baldie calves.

of staying with the Hereford breed,” Cliff says. “To make that happen, we had to do without a lot of things. We are very appreciative of the sacrifices they made.”

Because of the Copeland family’s commitment and success, they were named the 2008 New Mexico Ranch Family of the Year.

The ranch

Located in northeastern New Mexico, with an elevation of about 4,500 feet, the ranch is part of “short grass” country.

According to Cliff, their environment can be severe with an annual rainfall of 15 inches, in the good years, and temperatures ranging from 110 degrees in the summer to minus 15 degrees in the winter with chill factors down to minus 40 or more at times.

“The old timers say we are always only 30 minutes away from a drought,” Cliff says. “But cattle can do as good here as any other place on the planet if conditions are right.”

The Copeland program

With the motto “This is a ‘no nonsense, real world’ cattle operation,” the Copelands strive to produce cattle that will work for their commercial customers.

Copelands utilize every tool available to help them to select and produce better cattle including performance records, expected

progeny differences (EPDs) and feedlot testing.

“Convenience traits like udders and feet are extremely important,” Cliff says. “Good feet are a must because of the distance these cows are required to travel. Our cows have to be problem free, they must go out and do their job.”

The registered herd is managed under the same conditions as the commercial cows. The Copelands’ program includes grazing year round with only range cube supplementation. Most years they do not feed hay. This practice proves the registered cows can thrive in the New Mexico environment as well as in the commercial industry.

All cows must produce a calf every year in a 60-day breeding season, or they are culled. “They are expected to go out, have a calf, raise it, fight off predators and bring it in the fall,” Cliff explains. “Fertility is our only maximum trait. All other traits must be in balance with the environment.

“We get really cranky about good udders,” Cliff adds. “We don’t have time to get cows in to help their calves nurse.”

They also keep an eye on milk production with the philosophy that too much milk can be a problem with breed back, tends to shorten udder life and adds to cow maintenance costs.

After weaning, bull calves are developed on grass traps. “We don’t push for a big gain,” Cliff says. “We don’t want the bulls to gain more than 3 lb./day.”

This test allows the Copelands to see which bulls will perform but will keep them in good shape to sell as yearlings. “We won’t sell a bull that we wouldn’t use on our own cows,” Cliff adds.

He says their customers prefer to buy yearlings instead of 2-year-olds. “If they don’t utilize them too heavy as a yearling, they believe a bull will last a year longer than if they wait to use him as a 2-year-old,” Cliff explains.

When a new bull customer visits the ranch, Cliff says the first thing they try to do is take the producer to see the commercial cows and calves. “If you like these cows and calves, you’ll like our program,” he tells them.

Marketing program

The Copelands have developed multiple marketing outlets which target different customers.

For two years, the Copelands have partnered with Langford Herefords, Okmulgee, Okla., to host a joint production sale in October featuring registered females and bulls targeting the junior and seedstock markets.

Also in October, they host an online heifer sale and an online steer sale marketing show prospects.

In April bulls are sold off the ranch similar to the Ferry Carpenter concept. During an open house, customers can visit the Copeland ranch and view available bulls.

All buyers are given a performance and base price sheet on arrival. When the sale starts everyone interested is asked to draw a number out of a can. The person who draws No. 1 gets to select any bull they want at the base price. However, if another person or persons want to bid on that bull, then an auction starting from the base bid is commenced. If no one else other than buyer No. 1 wants the bull then they purchase that bull at the base price.

After buyer one then buyer two selects a bull and the whole process starts over until everyone who has drawn a number has had their chance to buy a bull. Then all numbers are put back in the can and the bidding process starts over again with whomever drew No. 1 having the chance to buy a bull and so forth until all bulls are gone.

“Most of our buyers are busy folks and it is calving season and normally the buyers show up about 9 a.m. for coffee and donuts and the sale is over and everyone is headed home by 11 a.m.,” Cliff explains. “This method allows everyone to bid on all bulls and just not be a first-come, first-serve basis like most private treaty sales. Sale expense is a bare minimum and the buyers really feel comfortable bidding in this low key atmosphere.”

Some herd bull prospects for registered programs are sold while still on the cow and or up to a year of age.

The commercial steers are sold in the fall weaned and after a Vac 45 program. The heifers not retained for the ranch are sold almost always as

replacement heifers and not feeders. They are marketed in the fall or the spring depending on the market demand and feed availability.

The showing

Showing has been an asset to their marketing program and has increased herd awareness.

The Copeland family has showed for many years at the state and local levels. And, in the past 10 years, they’ve hit the national scene, exhibiting at the National Western Stock Show, American Royal, Fort Worth Stock Show, Arizona National and North American International Livestock Exposition.

Industry leader

Serving the Hereford and beef industry has always been a priority for the Copeland family.

Through the years, Cliff has been a member, director and president of the New Mexico Hereford Association. Cliff and Pat were New Mexico Junior Hereford Association advisors for 17 years and in July were named National Junior Hereford Association advisors.

Cliff has also been active in the New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association, New Mexico Beef Council and New Mexico Beef Cattle Performance Association, serving in leadership positions in all three organizations.

continued on page 26...

About the ranch

Originating in 1943 as Jack Copeland and Sons Herefords, the ranch was started by Clifford’s parents, Jack and Mary Alice Copeland, and his grandparents, Otis and Belinda Copeland.

What began as a commercial Hereford operation was then diversified into a combination registered and commercial Hereford operation. Although, from the beginning, ranch cattle were exhibited at shows locally and nationally, the cattle have always been bred to survive under range conditions and to produce all of the performance the severe Southwestern climate will allow.

Clifford and his wife, Barbara, took over the management of the ranch in 1959. In 1983 Cliff and his wife, Pat, moved home and joined the family operation. Finally, Matt and his wife, Kyla, make the fifth generation to continue the quest of producing the best cattle possible for Copeland customers.

Today the ranch is even more diversified, selling not only registered and commercial Herefords but also F1 baldie replacement heifers. In recent years, a club calf division has also been added. **HW**



Three generations of Copelands work together on the ranch. Pictured here are Matt, Pat, Cliff, Barbara and Clifford.



Matt and Kyla are the fifth generation of Copelands to ranch in northeast New Mexico.



In 2009 Cliff was elected to the AHA Board. During his tenure on the Board, he served as chairman of the show and sale and marketing committees and was a member of the executive, breed improvement and member service committees.

He says serving on the various committees has helped him understand the importance of the different AHA programs and how important it is to have a balanced approach as Board members.

“No one thing is more important than the other,” Cliff says. “They are all equally important to our membership.”

Committed to helping the breed, Cliff has also helped with Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) promotions in his area.

“Cliff’s leadership style is one of personal example,” says fellow Board member Marty Lueck, Mountain Grove, Mo. “He never has brought ego to the table and is a good listener. I appreciate his logic and forward thinking, and he is a great advocate to the Hereford breed and its membership.

“It certainly has been a privilege to serve with Cliff the past four years and an honor to call him my friend.”

Former AHA director and Texas Hereford breeder Paul “Butch” Funk agrees with Marty, adding, “Cliff Copeland is one of the finest leaders I know in our business or anywhere else. He can speak with anyone easily, and he is very approachable which makes all of us in our Association feel ‘part of the team.’

“Cliff also possesses the intellect and drive necessary in the best leaders, and he is, very important in my view, totally selfless. Finally, Cliff possesses two other characteristics not always found in our leaders in that he is truly humble and has a great sense of



with AHA President Copeland

Q What are your thoughts about serving as the 2013 American Hereford Association (AHA) president?

A First and foremost, it is an honor of a lifetime to be elevated to this position. If someone had asked me as a young man if this would happen, I would have said he was nuts. I am extremely humbled to serve as president, and I have tried my best to be deserving of the honor.

Q What do you consider to be the five highlights of fiscal year 2013?

- A** 1) Improved customer service and turnaround time.
- 2) Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC maintaining its level of sales in a tough consumer economy. The program was able to maintain the 17% increase we had during fiscal year 2012 in a flat consumer market.
- 3) Updated correlations for genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs) and blending genomic data up and down the entire pedigree. Also Hereford breeders’ commitment to getting more bulls tested to improve the accuracy.
- 4) Record setting sale prices.
- 5) A junior program that is on fire with enthusiasm and participation.



Q In 2010 the AHA Board approved a new strategic plan. Reviewing that plan, what are your thoughts on the strategy?

A I was fortunate to be a member of the strategic planning committee that helped develop the recent plan. It is soon going to be time to revisit the plan, but I think we are pretty well on target. Our current Board is in-tune with the plan, and I have confidence it will continue to move in that direction. Six key strategies I hope the Board and staff continue to focus on:

- 1) Continue to improve overall quality, consistency and profitability of Hereford genetics.
- 2) Continue to grow and improve the CHB program.
- 3) Continue to invest in member education and to improve customer service.
- 4) Continue to increase advertising and marketing efforts to ensure our place as a leader in beef production.
- 5) Cultivate and continue to grow our junior organization — the future of our breed lies in our juniors’ hands. I’d like to see more focus on leadership training and skills.
- 6) Continue our investment in all aspects of breed improvement, regardless of area — DNA testing, feed intake enhanced producers or whatever new comes along; this investment is paramount to our success as a breed.

Q How would you summarize your tenure on the Board?

A What a ride! My tenure on the Board has been filled with very exciting times. Our breed has seen unrivaled increase in interest and demand, both for bulls and females as well as commercial replacement heifers.

humor. We are lucky to have him as our president.”

Looking forward

Saturday morning cartoons can teach you a lot about life. Well, some of them.

A little secret about Cliff: his favorite cartoon character is Wile E. Coyote. As you might recall, the coyote, episode after episode, strives to catch the Road Runner.

“He is the most optimistic character, or he would have given up a long time ago,” Cliff explains.

Just like the coyote, through the years, Hereford breeders have had

tenacity and optimism to continue and to take the steps needed to continue to improve the breed.

“We are witnessing perhaps the greatest time to be a Hereford breeder ever,” Cliff says. “Enthusiasm is at an all-time high, and we are seeing record-setting bull and female sales.

“Our Herefords are better than they have ever been thanks to the tremendous effort of our members to make them the best that they can be. I take my hat off to our members for staying the course and for raising and improving the breed during a time when it would have been easy to give

up and go be producers of other kinds of cattle. It is because of your tenacity that we are seeing and enjoying success that is well deserved. With ongoing research in genomics, feed efficiency, calving ease and carcass traits, the breed should be prepared to meet the challenges of the future.”

Likewise, because of the Copeland family’s tenacity and commitment, the fifth generation of Copelands, and likely many generations to come, will carry on the tradition of raising profitable Hereford cattle. **HW**

Sale averages just keep amazing me, and Hereford now holds the record setting sale price of a bull. We have had enough DNA testing in the past year to now offer GE-EPDs to use as another selection tool.

CHB is in very sound shape financially and more exciting staff has been added to help enhance CHB LLC in the years to come.

Members now have two farm management software programs at their disposal that can also submit all TPR data as well.

Q What do we need to work on as a breed?

A Breeders are doing a good job of eliminating the traits that have been a problem in the past. But we must stay diligent in this endeavor.

I think we need to maintain some diversity in our gene pool and keep as many good lines of cattle that live up to our standards as possible. There is a good lesson to be learned from another breed about letting your breed gene pool get too thin.

We don’t have to all try to ride the same horse. This is particularly true on such things as cow size and milk. We should be producing what fits our environment, or more importantly our customers’ environment, with as few expensive inputs as possible.

Corn going from \$3 to \$7, or even if it is at \$4.50, is a game changer on how the beef industry will get cattle from gate to plate. We, as Hereford breeders, need to be part of the solution and produce bulls that will sire offspring that are as efficient as we know how to make them for all segments of the beef industry.

Q Considering the challenges facing the Board and the beef industry in general, what do you think Hereford leaders and Hereford members need to address?

A Market share, market share, market share. This is true no matter if you are selling bulls, females, show animals or CHB product. We are seeing demand for our breed right now like we have not seen it in decades. The challenge is “What do we do

to maintain and further increase the demand and acceptance of our breed?”

I think, from the commercial bull market aspect, we only have one shot at these customers. If we don’t supply what they need or want, they will move on to another breed.

We are producing the best Herefords ever, and I think the range bull buyers will see that in their calves sired by Hereford bulls. We must resist selling those animals that are not up to our standards just because they are worth quite a bit. We must continue to use every tool in the box — from performance records to EPDs, From DNA to scans and feed efficiency evaluations. Visual appraisal for structure, convenience traits and temperament are essential.

AHA must advertise as much as it can afford. It is very hard when our closest competitor has the resources to outspend us two or three times, maybe more. Our staff has done a tremendous job of getting us tremendous bang for our buck and has developed some truly awesome advertising campaigns with a limited budget.

Members need to be aware that they, too, have to promote our breed to the commercial sector.

Consumer acceptance of our product as it relates to animal welfare issues will continue to ramp up. We have a great story about our breed and its breeders and we are just going to have to tell it. Having all breeders certified in BQA (beef quality assurance) techniques would be great for that story as well.

Q What are some of your favorite memories from your time on the Board?

A The greatest opportunity I’ve had as a Board member has been getting to know so many great Hereford breeders from all over the country.

Some other highlights include attending the AHA Media Summit at Olsen Ranch in Nebraska and the World Hereford Conference in Calgary, being a part of the development of our five-year strategic plan, and getting to work with some awesome fellow Board members and staff. **HW**