

They Trust You



Jack Ward

The American Hereford Association (AHA) saw a great year in 2016, and this is due to the efforts of all members and their commitment to breeding cattle that are demanded by the commercial industry and are backed with information including pedigree, performance and integrity.

As seedstock producers, it is our job to listen to our customers and to know our environment in order to produce the type of cattle that can make our customers profitable. Our latest commercial cow-calf survey that was done by MarketSense Inc. in 2014 prior to the Genetic Summit showed that Hereford cattle are the most adaptable to all environments. Because of this adaptability and the ability to add more heterosis in a crossbreeding program, the Hereford breed has a presence in all regions of the United States. This continues to position us well and gives us an opportunity to market well-documented cattle into all parts of the country.

New economically relevant traits

Since 2003 the AHA has added four new traits to the genetic evaluation including Mature Cow Weight (MCW), Carcass Weight (CW), Teat Size (TEAT) and Udder Suspension (UDDR). In addition, we are currently reporting Dry Matter Intake (DMI), Sustained Cow Fertility (SCF) and Heifer Calving Rate (HCR) as research releases, and we will move them into the

current genetic evaluation in the next few months. Also, during these past few years, we changed how we display the carcass traits from an ultrasound basis to a harvest basis because these are the traits of economic relevance.

With the addition of these new traits, and more to be added, it becomes apparent that information overload can be a problem for customers. Not all cattle will be perfect for each trait. And, in many cases, more does not mean better. As we select for extremes in individual traits, we have antagonisms associated with other traits and that problem does not always mean these will be the most profitable for your customers.

For example, if you are selling Hereford bulls to an Angus-based commercial cow herd, the operation probably will not need Hereford bulls in the top 5% of the breed for Maternal Milk (MM) but may need to look at teat and udder quality or even fertility. In addition, this same customer may not need to be looking at just marbling for end-product merit but may need to consider CW and ribeye area traits.

With this possibility in mind, the AHA developed profit (\$) Indexes in order for breeders to select genetics that can be profitable and can be positive for genetic change in areas of economic relevance without selecting for single traits. These \$ Indexes reflect both the traits of interest and economic components associated with these traits. Over the next few months, the AHA will update the indexes with the new traits and different

economic components that are reflective for both the past and the future.

The role we play

The MarketSense survey also shows that customers look to their seedstock supplier for genetic information. In other words, even though your customers may not ask for or seem to pay a tremendous amount of time researching and looking at expected progeny differences (EPDs) and \$ Indexes, believe me, they still know they are important and they expect you to do that work for them. They trust you.

According to the survey, both the seedstock producer and the breed association play a big role in the commercial industry when it comes to information. This means that you, as seedstock producers, need to collect and submit the data and we at the AHA need to continue to focus on building a strong genetic evaluation and to develop traits of value.

It has been a great year, and as we start 2017, we see the agriculture industry getting strapped again on price, yet input costs do not seem to be moving down in a relative way. So, this challenge means that we need to put even more pressure on breeding decisions and using all the tools available to take the risk out of the cattle that you are selecting and selling.

With these possible tougher times ahead, Hereford cattle can have an effect on the beef industry because of the strengths of the breed and the commitment the breeders have to producing the type of cattle demanded. **HW**