Reflecting on 2008

As we enjoy another holiday season and reflect on the past year, I would like to take a minute to summarize a few things that have been going on in breed improvement and what we see on the horizon. During the American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting, Lee Haygood, recently retired breed improvement committee chairman, gave a nice overview of the year. The following is a quick reflection of those comments.

Genetic testing

During the past year, the AHA Board developed a set of rules that will allow breeders to test animals and have pedigrees listed accordingly for all genetic abnormalities. As I write this column, we have seen a large number of cattle submitted to be tested for dilutor (DL) and idiopathic epilepsy (IE).

One change that has been made since last month's article is that animals that are tested will be labeled DLF, DLC, IEF or IEC. This labeling system confirms that animals that have been tested are either free of the gene or are carriers.

During the Annual Meeting, the AHA honored Jon Beever for his service to the Hereford breed and the cattle industry in the field of molecular genetics (see Page 23). His work has changed the complexion of animal breeding.

Continued research

The AHA has continued its involvement in several research projects that are documenting the value of Hereford genetics in commercial programs. Circle A, Genglebach, Amana and Harris are all still involved in adding Hereford genetics into their programs to look at benefits in the area of feed efficiency, disposition, longevity, fertility and various other traits.

In addition, the AHA is still working with Olsen Ranches and Stahly Ranch to evaluate young sires. The AHA is also working with U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) and various universities in the area of genomics, including the 50,000 SNP bull project.

Pan-American evaluation

The AHA has been working with Canada, Uruguay and Argentina to produce a Pan-American evaluation. This work should be done by summer 2009. This evaluation should allow breeders from both continents to search the databases and find bulls that will make progress in the areas they demand.

New traits

The AHA will have several new traits added during the course of the next few months. Included will be a change in how udder scores will be measured. Instead of a one score system, we will begin to implement a two score system that will measure udder attachment and teat size. Each of these traits will be measured with a score between 1-9, with 9 being the highly attached udder and small teat size. Look for more about the new udder scoring system in the January *Hereford World.*

This year AHA also changed the way it publishes carcass traits from an ultrasound basis to a carcass trait scale. This change was done to continue to make all breeds consistent, which, in turn, will allow commercial customers to evaluate bulls from various breeds more accurately.

The AHA plans to add three additional traits to the analysis, including mature size, survivability and heifer fertility. These traits may be part of the existing indexes, part of new indexes or published by themselves or a combination of all. We will go into more detail on these through the course of the year.

Carcass collection

The AHA Board voted to allow breeders to submit carcass data on retained animals. Those rules and guidelines will be added to the Web site soon, or you may contact the AHA office for more details.

There is a continued increase in demand for good Hereford genetics throughout the U.S. and abroad. Bull studs have increased the number of Hereford sires, and we have seen an increased artificial insemination (AI) use by Hereford breeders. All of these things continue to move the Hereford breed in a very favorable direction. Continue the hard work and dedication you have to the breed.

I want to wish everyone a safe and blessed holiday season. God bless. **HW**

Jack Ward

Genetic defect labels

DLF - - - - dilutor free
DLC - - - dilutor carrier
IEF - - - - IE free
IEC - - - - IE carrier