

Kentucky Hereford Feeder Calves Hit a Home Run



Craig Huffhines

The bar was recently raised for the price of Hereford feeder cattle in Kentucky, and it was all because of good marketing and responding to the marketplace. For several years Hereford breeders and cow-calf producers have been frustrated that their odd number of Hereford calves going through the sale barn is consistently discounted. Now, we definitely know there is a way around those discounts.

For a decade Lowell Atwood, Kentucky Hereford breeder, has been watching what Tennessee Hereford breeders, in conjunction with Tennessee Livestock Producers (TLP), have been doing with their special Hereford feeder calf sale each October.

Each year, TLP organizes a preconditioned Hereford specification sale that has become known for high-quality cattle that perform well in the feedlot. For the last several years in Tennessee, participating producers' calves have topped the market or better and yet reaped premiums.

Wanting to recreate that success in Kentucky, Lowell contacted several local breeders as well as Tim Dietrich, Kentucky Department of Agriculture Beef Cattle Marketing Specialist, for their thoughts on starting a

program similar to the TLP program. He sought sound business advice from Tennessee special Hereford feeder sale organizer and American Hereford Association (AHA) Board member John Woolfolk.

The end result was a Kentucky special Hereford feeder calf sale that captured more than \$8 per hundredweight (cwt.) premium on Hereford steers and more than \$10 per cwt. premium on Hereford heifers on more than 530 head.

What will people do for a \$40 to \$50 per head premium as opposed to a \$40 to \$50 per head discount? It boils down to good marketing, management and cooperation that swung the balance in this particular Kentucky sale by up to \$100 per head as reported by Kentucky Department of Ag market analysts.

"It's not that Hereford cattle have been inferior in quality; they just simply haven't been marketed in large enough numbers under a standard health program to attract the big buyers that target truckload lots," says Tim Dietrich. "Kentucky Department of Agriculture organizes about 30 special Certified Preconditioned for Health (CPH45) sales each year and run about 30,000 to 35,000 steers

and heifers through those sales. We consistently see an \$8 to \$10 per hundred weight premium on those calves regardless of breed because our order buyers know they are a reliable source of feeder cattle."

Atwood and other Hereford breeders including Tim Wolf, Charlie Boyd and Ron Thomas decided it was time to do something about their marketing problem, so they collaborated with Dietrich and Jim Akers, Bluegrass Stockyards chief operating officer, to develop a Special Hereford CPH45 sale.

The sale attracted 532 Hereford-influenced calves to the Bluegrass facility. Akers hosted a steak dinner and fed more than 250 people. The local Southern States Coop farm store donated a working chute to give away in a drawing. Eastern Livestock, the largest order buying network in the eastern states was present with its buyers along with out-of-state buyer Danny Herrmann of Ford County Feed Yard in Kansas.

It was an overwhelming success. Congratulations to those involved in providing the service, communication and hard work necessary to add value to your calves and develop a strong working relationships that paid off handsomely. **HW**