

A History of Greats



Craig Huffhines

At the most recent American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Membership meeting three individual breeders and one family devoted to breeding Hereford cattle were honored by introduction into the Hereford Hall of Fame. Lilla Bell, Paradise Valley, Nev.; Jackie Davis, Lincoln, Calif.; Gene Wiese, Manning, Iowa; and the Douthit family of St. Francis, Kan., were all distinguishably recognized for their contributions to the Hereford breed.

We congratulate them for their many years of dedication and influence. Dedication, hard work, adoption of innovation, persistence, integrity, family values and statesmanship are all characteristics of these great individuals and their families.

The AHA also honored two men who led both the American Hereford Association and the American Polled Hereford Association (APHA) during a time of industry change, innovation and challenge. The times in which these two gentlemen served as chief executive officers was not a particularly good time for production agriculture, and it was not particularly the best of times for the Hereford breed for both horned and polled populations.

H.H. "Hop" Dickenson and T.D. "Dusty" Rich, past AHA and APHA executives, respectively, represented a generation of leadership

that was responsible for establishing a direction and vision for the Hereford breed that has influenced the demand for Hereford cattle to this day.

Looking back

Both leaders navigated their respective organizations through a period of fire and brimstone. The 1970s commercial cow herd was dominated by Hereford influence. A slow erosion of Hereford market share was underway as Continental European breeds began flooding the industry. The packing industry converted from carcass beef to fast-chain, boxed-beef production, which influenced packer economics and the packers' respective buying signal for type and kind of cattle.

At the same time, American consumers, influenced by the medical profession and sensational media reports, became concerned with the amount of fat in their diets. Consequently, the signal for larger framed, heavier muscled, lean, high-yielding cattle was enforced from the packing industry, putting the Hereford breed on the other side of the fence from packer demand.

Ultimately, the dominant U.S. commercial Hereford herd became the basis for beef industry crossbreeding and, consequently, Hereford bull demand experienced a 30-year decline. In the 1980s, the Angus breed found its strength in quality grade and

began a long and storied development of the first beef breed brand and, thereby, corrected a dismal market share shift that eventually resulted in the breed's current strong position within the industry.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the tax laws were much different from what they are today. Masses of wealth could be sheltered in production agriculture, avoiding tax collection and attracting large investors. These investors were not necessarily interested in the long-term improvement of the breed. Their motives for investing in the beef industry were more based on entertainment, legal tax evasion and genetic speculation as opposed to producing genetics that have a commercial purpose.

The amazing investment and injection of capital culminated in mega prices for high-profile bulls such as Denver horned Hereford champions David and Learch and polled Hereford bulls such as the 1981 North American Champion "Jogger" (Will Via Justa V), bringing \$250,000 for one-quarter interest, and his brother Enforcer 107H, a bull with semen sales to South America amounting to \$1 million in value in one year. In 1985 more than 40 polled Hereford females brought six digit figures at public auction.

The end to this crazy investment scheme came in 1985 with the passing of

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the Gramm-Rudman Act, a historic tax reform act that eliminated massive agriculture exemptions that halted major capital investments in the beef cattle and equine industries. Artificial stimulus of the seedstock industry ended, bringing the industry back under real-world economic standards. This economic change in conjunction with the packer demand shift further eroded the Hereford population.

Navigating the times

Dickenson and Rich navigated these trying times for the breed: times when horned Hereford and polled Hereford breeders were fierce competitors with one another. Both of these gentlemen came from agriculture backgrounds. They trained in beef cattle husbandry and both were Extension educators before they made their careers with their respective associations.

They both had a strong understanding of the science behind modern animal breeding, and along with their knowledge, they were both gifted personalities with strong people skills and effective communicators with their respective boards and membership. Their credibility within the industry enabled them to set policy and direction from a breed improvement standpoint that has left a legacy today.

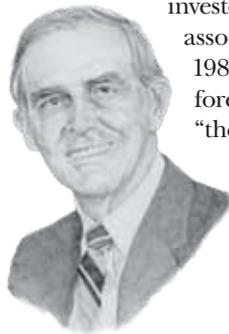
Dickenson and Rich both implemented performance-recording programs, launching modern expected progeny differences (EPDs) into their respective herd books. The launching of the new statistical models was not necessarily popular as many of you can imagine.

Today, EPDs are still being questioned; however, the results of what the modern animal breeding EPD system has done for the

Hereford breed are indisputably evident in today's breed trend. The AHA has built upon the original backbone of the Total Performance Recording (TPR) program, evolving the system through the development of new economically relevant traits, economic indexes and the most recent introduction of genomic-enhanced EPDs (GE-EPDs).

The Perfection case

Breed integrity was a non-negotiable issue for both of these men. Dickenson and Rich both took on wealthy investors in court or by association rule in the mid-1980s in a case that will forever be remembered as "the Perfection case." The integrity of the breed and the charters of both the AHA and APHA organizations were at stake.



Hop Dickenson

The bull "Perfection" became immensely popular for delivering the single trait demand for frame that the entire industry was chasing. It so happened that the bull was not a purebred and had pedigree problems, and both AHA and APHA took the pedigree to task in order to uphold the mission of the Association of protecting the genetic history and pedigree integrity of the herd book.

The legal battle and rule enforcement was about breed integrity and predictability, and the case is still being referenced today as it relates to product liability and association charter protection. The case was costly but set a precedence for product integrity that we still live by today.

Leaving a legacy

Years after the fact, history tends to write itself from a 50,000 foot view. Both of these men led during trying times but still managed to influence a direction for the Hereford breed to this day. Dickenson and Rich

were the first to begin board talks between the AHA and APHA to discuss similarities in their respective organizations that would plant seeds for future amalgamation of the two organizations. Both started their respective organizations down the path of using good science and statistical methods to predict genetic merit in the population.

Dickenson and his board funded the largest ever breed characterization study with Colorado State University and Monfort Packing Co., which documented the wonderful end product palatability traits of the Hereford breed. He is considered the "father" of the Certified Hereford Beef program, and his vision would result in the growth of a program that is recognized today as one of two of the nation's top-quality brands.

We have the benefit of history for reflection and a perspective that is above the emotional aspects of change that the respective organization endured over time. We are operating at a time when the demand for Hereford cattle has not seen these heights for the value of the average Hereford range bull in more than 50 years.

We owe a great deal to these two men, many others not mentioned in this column and the breeders who were honored this year for their tenacity, loyalty, dedication and vision of what this breed means to the U.S. beef cattle industry. Thank you and congratulations to all of these fine people and the legacy that they have brought to our industry.

Happy holidays

On behalf of the AHA staff and Board, we wish all our members a merry Christmas and a prosperous 2013. **HW**