

Hereford Breed Reaches a 'Tipping Point'

In the widely acclaimed bestselling book, "The Tipping Point," Malcolm Gladwell describes the magic moment when an idea, trend or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips and spreads like wildfire.

From fashion to communication technology, political movements or, in our case, the demand for a certain breed of cattle, ideas are all impacted by very small, subtle influences that eventually take the popularity of that "something" over the edge, just as a single person can start an epidemic of the flu.

Great examples of our time are the square-toed western boots, decorative pockets on jeans, the use of personal communication devices and the billions of apps that take up what used to be quiet time in our lives. Other somewhat recent radical movements overseas brought about the Arab Spring and the organization of

political uprisings all over the Middle East. Much of these movements was driven by social media, which seemed to have organized the thoughts of millions and in one fell swoop created a spike in political upheaval in an already volatile area of the world.

The Arab Spring is certainly a very scary, extreme example of "a tipping point," but it illustrates how social epidemics take shape and explode sometimes with surprising outcomes. Whether it's an epidemic of crime rate in a city, drop-out rate in a high school or something far less ugly like consumer trends in pop culture fashion or style, subtle change is constantly moving people to popular preferences.

In our business — the U.S. cattle industry — we producers are facing very similar tipping points. Some are very good in the case of the Hereford breed's advancing popularity. Others coming down the pike such as mandatory animal ID or audited humane handling of livestock might make life, if not challenging for us, certainly different.

In the case of Hereford breed popularity, we have witnessed the tipping point in the last three years. In 2010 the American Hereford Association (AHA) conducted the third of a series of commercial producer surveys spread out over 13 years to quantify the trending attitude of commercial cow-calf producers toward purchasing decisions of various breeds of bulls, traits of importance and profit drivers in their operations.

The survey conducted in collaboration with *Drovers*

indicated that over a five-year time span, the number of cattlemen interested in purchasing a Hereford bull increased by 64% from one in seven producers to one in every four producers.

The 2010 survey determined that nearly 24% of cattlemen with 75 cows or more were wanting to buy a Hereford bull in the next three years. As it turns out, the survey proved accurate, and the demand shift for Hereford bulls has climbed dramatically in the last three years as is evident by the price increase paid for Hereford bulls at production sales and the demand reports of local private treaty sales of both small and large breeders alike (See Table 1).

In addition, we have also witnessed an explosion for the demand in elite females. New embryo technology may have a great deal to do with the higher investment in elite females, but the demand in the average Hereford female has grown dramatically as well.

The AHA Board has commissioned another cow-calf survey that will take a look at this trend again. Undoubtedly, the Hereford breed has struck a nerve within a variety of segments within the industry including the commercial cow-calf, food and youth. If Hereford breeders continue to maintain a very high level of business integrity, I'm certain this tipping point and subsequent trend will be sustainable for many years to come.

On behalf of my family, I wish all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. **HW**



Craig Huffhines

Table 1: Average prices paid for Hereford bulls and females (as reported to *Hereford World* staff)

