



Continuing the Conversation

During the Hereford Genetic Summit Sept. 4-5, 2014, Hereford breeders were challenged to embrace technology, focus on the customer, and concentrate on feed efficiency and end product merit to help position the breed to gain more commercial market share. We will “continue the conversation” in upcoming *Hereford World* issues as we discuss with breeders key take-home messages from the conference and as an Association we continue to build a roadmap for improving Herefords’ position in the cattle industry. For a complete summary of the event, visit HerefordGeneticSummit.com or see the October *Hereford World*.

This issue:

Customer Service

You Say You Want Purple Cattle...

Meeting market demands and providing consistent quality cattle can keep Hereford genetics at top of mind for commercial cattlemen.

by **Julie White**

The data speaks for itself, or does it? There are a lot of options for commercial cattlemen out there when choosing their next bull or set of females. The Hereford breed offers a variety of tools to those cattlemen, but when seedstock breeders provide customers with that added value, it just might move the needle on the Hereford breed’s prominence in the industry.

More than bulls

“We produce the best cattle we possibly can so when our customers buy our seedstock and our genetics they can be comfortable with the bulls they take home,” says Wayne Mrnak of Mrnak Herefords, Bowman, N.D. “We want our bulls to do what our customers expect them to do.”

Wayne and his family run 350 registered cows on their ranch, and maintain an Angus cow herd used as recipis in their embryo transfer (ET)

program. Each February they market on average 100 head of on-coming 2-year-old Hereford bulls and 70 registered Hereford yearling heifers. In their most recent sale, all but two bulls went to commercial cattlemen.

For the past 10 years, the Mrnaks have invited their customers to market their F1-cross black baldie females from Mrnak Hereford genetics in the production sale. In the 2014 sale, the baldie female lots topped out at 450 head — all from Mrnak customers.

“Justin, a young man who bought some bulls from us, wanted to find a way to sell his females,” Wayne explains. “He asked if he could put a few in our sale and we thought it sounded like a great idea. Tragically, he was killed in a car accident and never got to see how it all came together.”

Wayne says once they began offering to sell pens of their customers’ baldie females, the interest grew by word of mouth. “People were seeing what we were doing and what we had done,” he says. “We found that buyers were wanting to purchase a pen from one breeder. They wanted heifers that come from a one-iron operation.”

They sell the baldies by weight groups and are able to accommodate breeders of various sizes with some offering 10-15 females and others 75-80 head.

Mrnak customers are still responsible for paying commission,



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but the ranch promotes the cattle for their patrons in the sale catalog, advertisements and radio spots free of charge. “We give them an excellent opportunity to market their black baldie females,” Wayne says.

In addition to the sale, Mrnak Herefords owns and operates a 1,000-head feedlot. The Mrnaks purchase Hereford steers from their customers and background them to around 900 lb.

Feeder calves influence Hereford demand

On the eastern half of the U.S., a team in the Bluegrass State saw an opportunity to provide value to Hereford-influenced feeder calves — more so a place to sell whiteface calves at a fair price — through the Kentucky Hereford-Influenced Feeder Calf Sale.

“The emphasis for organizing the sale was because we weren’t getting enough money for our Hereford cattle compared to some of the other breeds,” says Lowell Atwood, Kentucky Hereford breeder and sale coordinator. “We formed a committee and we talked about it.”

Kentucky Hereford breeders collaborated to host their first feeder calf sale in 2009, which was modeled after the Tennessee Hereford Marketing Program Feeder Calf Sale. “We talked to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the University of Kentucky animal science department and the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.” He says they also relied heavily on the assistance of John Woolfolk, Jackson, Tenn. “John saved us from making a lot of missteps,” Lowell adds.

Kentucky hosts two sales each year at the Bluegrass Stockyards South in Stanford, Ky. — one in May and one in December. They are averaging five to seven pot loads (50,000-lb. lots) per sale. “This is a place where we can bring in a number of cattle from the northeastern states, including West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania, load them on semis and send them to the feedlots,” says Lowell.



In addition to hosting and promoting the sale for consignors, the committee provides brochures and information on management practices to help breeders improve their profitability.

Lowell says the sale has changed the face of Herefords in central Kentucky. “We were not getting as much for our Hereford cattle when we started the sale as black-hided cattle were bringing,” he explains. “And we really have affected the price of Hereford breeding stock in the area. The demand for Hereford cattle is unbelievable.”

Not only is the Kentucky Hereford-Influenced Feeder Calf Sale a service to Hereford breeders in the region, but buyers have the opportunity to purchase large numbers of consistent cattle. “You’ve got to have cattle that have the muscle to grade and gain,” Lowell says. “You have to know what the market demands and our consignors have done a great job of that. We have buyers calling back saying they are really pleased with the cattle they bought because they grew well, gained well and went to slaughter and yielded well. If you can bring those to our sale they will sell good.”

Lowell explains that cattlemen have done a lot to improve and buyers like Herefords, but there is still more room for growth in market share.

It’s all about the buyer

Offering added value to their seedstock is what has improved the market for Mrnak genetics says Wayne. “Anything you can do for your customer in any business is

good for your bottom line,” he adds. “They appreciate what we do ... that we are willing to do what we can to keep them in business.”

Wayne says the cornerstone to a successful seedstock operation is integrity. “Treat people like they are the most important people in the world, because they are,” he says. “What you can do for them

“If they want to buy purple cattle, you’d better figure out how to make ‘em purple.”

Wayne Mrnak

as far as testing and genomic enhanced-expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs), and all the technology we have today is very important to gain the trust and faith of customers.”

He also, like Lowell, says it’s imperative to know your customer and to produce what they want. “We have very few customers come to us for bulls to put on heifers,” he says. “We use calving-ease genetics, but we’re not known as ‘heifer bull’ producers.”

When it all comes down to it, “the customer is always right” and it’s the seedstock breeder’s responsibility to provide the tools and stock to meet the customers’ demands and to keep them profitable. Wayne remembers what his father used to say, “If they want to buy purple cattle, you’d better figure out how to make ‘em purple.” **HW**