

Understanding Our Role



Jack Ward

The American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors participated in a strategic planning process to help set the Association's course for the next five years. The three-day planning session was facilitated by Kevin Ochsner, owner of Agccelerate LLC, and host of National Cattlemen's Beef Association's (NCBA) "Cattlemen to Cattlemen."

More than 30 industry leaders were surveyed to help define key drivers for the seedstock industry over the next five years. Those surveyed included thought leaders from the commercial cow-calf, seedstock, feedlot, bull stud and packer industries.

After those interviews were completed, a member survey was developed and sent to the AHA membership with more than 500 returned. This survey was comprehensive and included questions that touched on all aspects of the industry and membership issues.

Strategic planning

The Board met April 4-6 in Kansas City, Mo., for the planning meeting, which was opened by five speakers from various industry segments. John Lundeen, NCBA senior executive director of market research, kicked off the presentations by focusing on the purchasing trends and preferences of beef consumers from the retail side of the business. Joe Pawlak of Technomic then shared consumer trends and preferences from the food service industry.

John Butler, CEO of the Beef Marketing Group, shared how he has worked with a set of feedlot owners and the packing industry and food service distribution to create value for a documented high-quality product that can be co-branded. The Beef Marketing Group has created a unique integrated approach to feeding and marketing fat cattle.

Mitch Abrahamson, poultry industry geneticist, and Clint Schwab, senior director of science and technology for The Maschhoffs LLC, focused on how the poultry and pork industries have made tremendous genetic progress by focusing on data collection and endorsing all tools available. Both industries focus on crossbreeding and identifying specific lines that can complement one another to make progress.

These speakers, along with the survey information from the industry and membership, stimulated some real thought for the Board and gave them the opportunity to focus on key areas of importance for the AHA in the next five years.

Ochsner continues to meet with the Board as it finalizes the plan. The final version of the strategic plan will be completed in July.

One of the key components the Board recognized in this meeting is that the Association has a great asset in its people. That asset includes staff, but it goes way beyond staff

and includes the AHA's membership. The Hereford family is certainly strong and has seen growth over the past few years. It's important for our membership to understand its role in the growth of the Hereford breed and how together we can be a real force with a common message.

A unique business

The beef industry is unique to other protein businesses because it is not as integrated and still provides cattlemen the ability to make choices for their business. In other words, you can make your own choices and use the tools available to produce the type of cattle your customers demand.

With that in mind, let me be clear, your best approach is to market and to support your program and not to be critical of others. It seems our society focuses more on diminishing the accomplishments of others instead of promoting their own strengths.

Technology has changed so much over the past few years, and we use tools to communicate throughout the world instantly without facts, but with opinions. All of us love our opinions, and it is a right that we enjoy in our country, but we need to be cautious and to understand the importance of focusing on the positive and to fully understand the facts of a situation. **HW**