

by Shane Bedwell

Heterosis Works

Utilizing Hereford in a crossbreeding program has proven paybacks.



Shane Bedwell is the chief operating officer and director of breed improvement of the American Hereford Association. He can be reached at sbedwell@hereford.org.

Mother nature surely has given the country something to watch this past couple of months. Between devastating hurricanes and unruly fires, she has wrecked a lot of folks' livelihoods.

I certainly wish everyone involved in these tragedies a speedy recovery. Again, events like these remind us how important family is and how quickly we can lose sight of what's important.

The last couple of month's I've had the opportunity to travel to several states and to interact with seedstock

and commercial breeders alike. It's been exciting to witness the amount of enthusiasm for the breed right now and hear the success stories that producers utilizing Hereford genetics are having in their operations.

The message is consistent and clear – heterosis works. This shouldn't come as a shock to many of you as research on heterosis has been well documented and repeatedly proven. The great part about heterosis is that it packs a two-part punch:

1) direct heterosis – the increase in performance and health of the calf; and 2) maternal heterosis – the increase of cow productivity by gains in pregnancy rate, sustained fertility and more pounds of calf produced over a lifetime.

An unbeatable baldie

That's right; by turning out a Hereford bull on black or red cows, you're going to have an unbeatable baldie.

A steer calf that weighs more at weaning has advantage in terms of good health for the feedlot, while setting back a heifer replacement that can give you more longevity and increased production. And yes, I'm saying Hereford can give you all these advantages and more.

You see, with heterosis, the more unrelated the two breeds utilized in crossbreeding are, the more bang you get for your buck.

The United States Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) Germ Plasm Evaluation showed that Hereford was the most unrelated breed as compared to other breeds, meaning that when selected for crossbreeding programs, Hereford can maximize both direct and maternal heterosis.

In addition to this advantage, the strides the breed has made in the last 15 years through disciplined selection on calving ease and birth weight traits while increasing performance and end-product merit traits have leveraged Hereford to be the logical choice to be that sire of choice. Plus, the breed has certainly improved udder and maternal qualities to make your replacements shine in the pasture.

In the next few months, you will find a new national ad campaign "The Bald-Faced Truth About Hereford Genetics." This ad focuses on and documents the facts in utilizing Hereford genetics in crossbreeding programs.

If you are a commercial cattleman who is not taking advantage of heterosis – and, specifically, Hereford heterosis – I would encourage you to ask yourself, "Why not?" I'm sure many of you have been in the business long enough now to experience some really good times financially and some tough times you are glad are well behind you.

Capitalizing on breed complementary and heterosis makes logical sense to take as much risk as possible out of today's cattle market. **HW**

American Hereford Association genetic trends by trait

