

# AHA Hosts Educational Forum

by **Stephanie White**

Hereford breeders gathered Oct. 27 to learn from a variety of industry topics at the educational forum during the American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting and Conference. Expanded to an all-day event, the forum on Friday offered two general sessions in the morning and six breakout sessions followed in the afternoon.

In the first general session, Paving the Genetic Path, Dorian Garrick, AL Rae Center chief scientist, and Bruce Golden, Theta Solutions LLC CEO, broke down fundamental changes of the improved AHA genetic evaluation. A full summary of key points can be found on Page 28.

In the second general session, attendees learned about the inaugural National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Fed Steer Shootout.

In the afternoon, Hereford breeders had the opportunity to attend four of the six breakout sessions to learn more about topics of their choice.

## Fed Steer Shootout

AHA Director of Commercial Programs Trey Befort and Gregory Feedlots Manager David Trowbridge share about the success of the first NJHA Fed Steer Shootout.

Befort explains, "We sat down about a year ago to try to develop a program for our junior members outside of the showring so they could gain some industry knowledge and experience specifically with commercial cattle feeding."



The differences and importance of the new strategic plan for AHA was shared with Hereford breeders during the educational forum.

The contest was split into purebred and commercial divisions. Purebred cattle had to be registered with the AHA, and the commercial cattle had to be either Hereford or Hereford-British cross cattle that would meet the Certified Hereford Beef® live requirements.

"This first year we were pretty pleased with the turnout," Befort says. "We had 72 total steers to start, that came from 29 different junior members from 10 different states."

Trowbridge, who maintains cattle at Gregory Feedlots in Tabor, Iowa, broke down the specifics of the contest.

"The criteria for the contest to pick a winner is based on the retail value per average day on feed," Trowbridge says. "We start off with a base calf of carcass weight. Let's say your calf weighs 300 lb. We use a 55% yield on an unfed calf, and that is just an average we use to study base carcass weight."

Trowbridge says what they are looking for in this contest is a calf that puts on the retail value per day on

feed — rate of gain. He adds that carcass quality and premiums for the United States Department of Agriculture grades affect the value of the calf. The contest also considers yield grade.

"All those numbers are put into a formula when we are done, and we have collected all the carcass data and the grades on the cattle," he says. "We have the performance on the cattle and that's the calculation that is going to pick the winners and losers in this."

Trowbridge says the contest did a few things not normally seen in feedlot operations. "We wanted to show, as far as the educational program, a little bit of how the growth of the cattle go along with the ultrasound information that we get (backfat and ribeye) and how that progresses during the life of that animal," Trowbridge explains.

At the end of the contest, the data were collected and calculated to determine the contest winner.

"We sat down and we analyzed this data," Trowbridge says. "There are around 50 different points on each calf that we had information on."

## Hereford: Leading the Industry

AHA Executive Vice President Jack Ward discusses the AHA's 2017-22 strategic plan and shares comparisons of what was done in the past and the importance of the new plan.

"Obviously, it is important for any kind of a business, no matter what it is, to set some goals and look to the future," Ward says. "It helps us as a staff,



Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs says the Fed Steer Shootout was developed to provide junior members commercial cattle feeding experience.

with the direction of the Board, to set some goals for some opportunities and to show us where we need to focus and what is going on in the industry."

The AHA involved the membership when preparing the plan.

"As you remember we went through the survey process," Ward says. "But we wanted to include the membership and some industry top leaders outside of the organization who are involved in the beef cattle business. Then we wanted to have some folks who were from outside our industry. We were really fortunate to have five industry leaders that came and spoke to the Board as we got into this planning session."

Ward states the AHA Board of Directors were the ones that worked on the final plans and put the core strategy together. The surveying process had great reach and was critical to the strategy behind the plan.

Ward shares the survey had 518 participants from 43 states. "We were well represented in this survey," Ward says. "We got some really great information from this survey and learned what information and service you want to receive from the AHA. We learned what you are seeing in terms of how we are helping you market your animals and the things we are doing representing you within the industry — that was certainly step two in this process."

After a planning period, the information and the strategic plan were sent out to the AHA Board. The Board voted unanimously to accept the plan that had been developed.

"We are all in this industry together," Ward says. "We are just releasing a new national ad campaign that helps to promote the sale of Hereford genetics in the commercial cow herd based off this strategic plan."

Ward says a new mission statement came out of the strategic plan:

*To grow demand for Hereford genetics by delivering the highest quality and most efficient services to members and other progressive cattlemen in the area of breed registry and genetic improvements and education.*

Ward also shares that the vision statement took on a new look and some core strategies were defined.



There is great value in succession planning, and Hereford members learned how they can prepare during the educational forum.

"We need you all to become a part of Team Hereford and to be telling the story on the local and state level," Ward says. "You need to be active in your local beef cattle associations, the state beef cattle associations and national organizations. You need to be a part of it and you need to be a face at all these meetings and we need to be recognized as industry leaders at some of these meetings."

### Generational Transitions

Billy Cordasco, Babbitt Ranches president, shares the importance of succession planning. He points out the value of a plan and how it will help with family unity and future success for both the family and the business.

"What I got to see growing up was quite a bit of family transitions and a lot of different family issues," Cordasco says. "I saw a lot of different ownership issues and management issues, a lot of different things that are really not uncommon. Thankfully for a lot of terrific people, patience and a lot of hard work, we are where we are today and we are very thankful for that."

Cordasco says everyone has a history in their family. "When we start talking about succession planning, yes, we are talking about tomorrow, and transition is just about tomorrow," he says. "But we as an industry, and as a culture carry a lot of our history with us when we do that. In some ways, we want to pass that down to our next generation, as well."

Cordasco points out a successful succession plan means looking at every aspect of the business and making sure every component and person is addressed.

"When doing succession planning it is not just about the business," he says. "A lot of the times you have an operation and you have managers hired and that is its own box. Then you have the owners who in many ways are their own box, too, looking for a return on their investment. Then you have the other circle who is the family, kids and the grandparents. The extended cousins and all the other things that are involved. When doing succession planning you just can't look at one."

Cordasco shares two priorities that his ranch's operation depends on for succession planning.

"Having an understanding of your ownership is very important so that you make better decisions about what you need to do and how you need to do it," Cordasco says. "The second one is land use and stewardship. We want to say we are in ranching, that is what we want to say. But what we are actually in is owning the land. On this land, we can do anything we want to, including ranching. That was a really big switch for us because it just defined clearly what it is that we were involved in and that helped us with our succession planning."

Being proactive is how the Babbitt Ranch operates.

"With the Babbitts I have seen relationships that can be at their worst, and I have seen relationships be at the best," Cordasco says. "Now that we have been able to identify that, we have been able to develop some structure to address this instead of running away from it."

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## Maximizing Profit

Brent Lowderman, Carthage Livestock Inc. owner and operator, and Case Gabel, Magnum Feedyard Co. LLC cattle procurement, share their view of marketing feeder cattle or procurement of feeder cattle.

Lowderman hosts a Hereford feeder calf sale

at his stockyards and shares how having a strictly Hereford sale adds value to the feeder cattle.

"To qualify for this Hereford feeder calf sale, the Greater Midwest Feeder Calf Sale, the calf has to have two rounds of shots, complete vaccinations and must be weaned 40 days," Lowderman says. "They also have to be castrated and dehorned. With that being said, when the cattle arrive at my stockyards they will be weighed and they will be graded and they will be put in load lots. They will be broke down into 50 lb. increments. Heifers we break down into 75 lb. increments."

Lowderman compares the Hereford sale to others he has at his stockyards. He shares that many Hereford load lots compare in price to other cattle.

"In the same week, I have a Certified Angus Beef sale. Within that week we can compare a lot of prices between the Hereford and the black-hided sale. Every year we will be within \$1 and \$3 of what the black cows bring. Last year there were three lot loads that outsold the black-hided cattle."

Gabel agrees and likes seeing the cattle divided by type and kind.

"I think it makes a lot of sense in terms of grouping these cattle in load lots," Gabel says. "I think there is a lot of value to be gained by doing that."



Brent Lowderman and Case Gabel share their expertise on maximizing profit within your herd.

Gabel finds it hard to utilize cattle in his commercial feedlot setting if they are spread out in weight and type.

"It is hard for a guy in a commercial feedyard setting to be able to utilize those cattle because we only have so much pen

space and we try to run at capacity all the time," Gabel says. "We need to be trying to buy load lots of cattle that are uniform and consistent in both their weight, size and genotype."

Gabel has confidence in the Hereford Advantage program and believes Hereford breeders should be taking advantage of the benefits.

Gabel says "I think it is a tremendous program for any member of the Association who has registered cattle or commercial users of registered Hereford bulls. Those cattle have a reputation at that point."

He says he gains confidence as a buyer when he receives an email sharing that a particular set of cattle has a certain genotype, what shots have been administered and how the cattle have been preconditioned.

"The Hereford Advantage program has definitely increased the number of predominately Hereford cattle that we have on feed," Gabel says.

## Building Your Brand

Matt Weeks, AdFarm strategy lead, and Hereford breeder Melissa Grimmel Shaake, Grimmel Girls Show Cattle, focuses on sharing positive ways for Hereford breeders to build their brand.

"Traditionally branding is recognized as a name, or logo or a symbol that

evokes a customer's perception of added value for which they will pay premium price," Weeks says.

Weeks shares that having a recognizable brand can evoke emotion. He also states that being recognizable can encourage greater value and a higher price point.

"A brand is a journey, it is a series of events," Weeks says. "It's how people feel when they purchase products from you or not. It is ongoing engagement. It kind of changes the table a bit because you can do a lot with developing your brand by communicating with clients. There are a number of different avenues where you can reach individuals and its more about the experience and the feeling that people buy from you that helps to inform and develop a plan."

Weeks shares that branding is more than just visuals or words.

"Being in the digital age there are any number of ways people can get information," Weeks says. "It is no longer just mass media, no longer just print advertisement that they find in a magazine. Instead it is really a two-way street. Customers expect to get information when they want it and how they want it. That includes being able to get a text message, on a website, or from social media interaction or any number of ways they want to get information on their time and their terms."

Weeks compares a brand to a lightning rod.

He says, "It can be a catalyst to launching themselves to a bigger platform and to new and different ways in which they can attract, retain and communicate with clients and customers."

Weeks shares three easy steps to building a plan:

- 1) Be laser focused on your customers and the value you provide to them. Understand their likes and dislikes. Understand why they buy from you and why they don't buy from you.
- 2) Define and tell your story extremely well. Everyone has a story and this is your unique differentiator.
- 3) Be selective in whatever you do and be great at that.



Hereford breeders hear about building their brand to optimize their operation.

Schaake believes social media is the key to reaching a new audience.

Schaake, who works for Ranch House Designs (RHD), shared RHD's marketing quiz, which livestock producers complete. Some of the results she says cattlemen can take away from this quiz are that 60% of buyers look to see if an operation has a Facebook page before buying. In addition, 85% of buyers look at a website before buying from a producer.

"So, people are doing their research online to learn more about you and who you are before they purchase a product from you," Schaake says.

Schaake shares her top advice for creating a strong presence on Facebook:

- 1) Have a professional profile and cover picture.
- 2) Plan content and not just around sale season.
- 3) Make short posts with a graphic or picture.
- 4) Provide high resolution images with your post.
- 5) Post content during high traffic times on social media.
- 6) Grow your audience by getting more people to your page by using paid advertising.

"There are a lot of different ways to promote your product, but Facebook specifically has helped us a good bit," Schaake says.

### Boots on the Hill

National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Director of Government Affairs Danielle Beck covers issues the individuals at NCBA worked on in the past year and are presently working on.

"Around 95% of our membership is family owned," she says. "We are producer driven and consumer focused. It is that 95% who give us our marching orders in Washington, D.C. I take my cues from our producers, and I apply those to everything that is happening at our Capitol."

She says they are always working on a host of issues. "It's our job to make



Danielle Beck, NCBA director of government affairs, shares hot topics with Hereford breeders.

sure folks on Capitol Hill, in the agencies and in the administration, are up to speed, well educated and are aware of all the issues that impact beef producers."

As an overview for 2016 Beck points out the political changes that occurred.

"It was a year of really big changes in politics in Washington, D.C.," she explains. "The Republican Party took control of the White House and both chambers of congress. That's the first-time Republicans had the majority since 2007. If you speak to anybody on the right they will tell you that is a clear rejection of the left."

Beck says more than 1,000 different seats, governorships, seats in the Senate and seats in the House and state legislatures were lost during the eight years that Obama was president. "Folks in the middle of our country will tell you that was a rejection of Obama himself," she says.

Currently NCBA is working on the Waters of the United States regulation, dietary guidelines, foot and mouth disease, electronic logging devices, an endangered species act, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the veterinary feed directive, market volatility and regulatory reform, to list just a few.

"For the first time ever, I feel like we have really great allies at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)," Beck says. "We do not have to

worry about the EPA trying to navigate puddles on farms and ranches and we don't have to worry about them trying to fine producers because of that."

In terms of issues NCBA has been working on, they have prioritized trade as one of their top issues.

Beck shares that NCBA worked very closely with the Obama administration on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

"TPP was a negotiation between the United States and 13 other countries," Beck says. "It would have lowered our tariffs abroad from 49% to 13%. There are huge markets abroad and TPP would have expanded our access. So TPP was a loss for us. The good news for us is that right off the bat (with the current administration) we gained access to China, and we have not had access to China in 13 years."

"The first issue being worked on is robust funding for the foot and mouth disease vaccine bank. Right now, our vaccine bank is the North American Vaccine Bank," Beck says. "We share all our vaccine with Canada and Mexico. If we were to have an outbreak here in the United States, we would not have enough vaccine to last beyond a week's time. All of our access to foreign markets abroad would be completely shut down and it would be incredibly devastating not just for beef producers but for all its related industries."

Beck encourages all producers to call their members of Congress and to share their stories with them. **HW**

**Editor's note:** The breakout session, Consumer Connections, will be covered in depth in the January issue of the *Hereford World*.



Hereford breeders heard from retail and foodservice industry professionals about what happens after their product enters into the food supply.