

In Session: The AHA Educational Forum

by *Kayla Jennings and Diane Meyer*

On Friday afternoon, American Hereford Association (AHA) staff members led an educational forum to engage Hereford breeders with the exciting changes taking place within the Association. Topics

included maximizing the use of genetic selection tools, touring the new MyHerd system, previewing the new Hereford Publications Inc. (HPI) online catalog format and discussing the *Certified Hereford Beef*®

program upgrade. This year's format allowed attendees to sit in on all four presentations. The following is a summary of each session.

Onward and Upward: Maximizing the Use of Genetic Selection Tools

In 2018, the AHA introduced several new improvements to its genetic selection tools. Shane Bedwell, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement, highlighted four key areas breeders need to understand regarding the changes in genetic tools: the difference between economically relevant traits (ERTs) and indicator traits, the premise of profit indexes, the profit index scaling change and the Cow Herd DNA Project.

Identifying ERTs

The first step in understanding profit indexes is understanding ERTs. Bedwell defines an ERT as a trait associated with a revenue stream or cost. Several factors go into determining if a trait can be considered an ERT. The primary way to identify an ERT is determining the revenue stream for an enterprise, and this changes across each stage of production. Bedwell identifies three questions seedstock and commercial producers must answer in order to

determine the ERTs most influential in their operations. First, what are your breeding and marketing goals? Second, what traits directly impact the profitability of your enterprise? And lastly, are there environmental restraints which dictate the level of performance acceptable for a given trait in your enterprise?

“The premise of breed improvement and being able to focus on intense selection pressure comes down to identifying the economically relevant traits,” Bedwell says. “That has evolved over time, and with continued advancements in technology we will continue to hone in on economically relevant traits so that we can truly account for them in the selection indices that we have.”

Profit indexes review

Index selection was started as a way to drive commercial profitability by simplifying sire selection through the use of ERTs. The baldy maternal index

(BMI\$), the Brahman influence index (BII\$) and the *Certified Hereford Beef* index (CHB\$) were designed based on three primary production scenarios.

BMI\$ is based on using Hereford bulls on mature, Angus cows. The biggest ERT driving this profit index is Sustained Cow Fertility (SCF).

“Fertility is the most important thing that we do,” Bedwell says. “This breed is so good because of the longevity and the ability of the Hereford female to last and work in production.”

BII\$ is formulated on the same premise as BMI\$, only the production scenario in play is one using Hereford bulls on a Brahman-based cowherd. Bedwell notes the ability for Herefords to adapt in all regions across the U.S. makes our breed superior in first generation (F1) females.

CHB\$ index differs from the previous two in that it is a terminal index. The production scenario is based on Herefords bulls on mature Angus cows, with all progeny being fed and marketed on a grid. Therefore, the big ERTs driving this index are carcass weight (CW) and dry matter intake (DMI), as intake is associated with cost.

Profit index scaling change

Last year, the AHA added SCF, CW and DMI into the profit indexes, which are all weighted heavily in their respective index. This caused the profit index values to increase dramatically. On Sept. 3, 2018, the AHA made a slight change in how the



Bedwell leads a discussion on the merit in considering economically relevant traits when making breeding decisions to propel the breed forward.

profit indexes were expressed so that they were displayed on an economic scale showing the profit potential of each animal. This simply means the profit indexes express a real economic value associated with dollars rather than a scaled number.

Cow Herd DNA Project

Bedwell wrapped up his session by expressing the importance of the Cow Herd DNA Project and how

collecting genotypes will help the AHA in making leaps and bounds in its genetic evaluation. For the project, the AHA teamed up with GeneSeek® and Allflex® to offer members a \$20 per head rate to get their cow herds genotyped. The advantages of participating in the project include an opportunity to gain valuable information early, comfort in knowing parentage is accurate and, most importantly, the improvement in the

quality of the prediction of the animals in the AHA genetic evaluation.

Bedwell notes the silver bullet in the longevity of the Hereford breed is recording both phenotypes and genotypes. “Whole herd reporting has paid dividends for our organization, and it is not going unnoticed by the rest of the industry,” Bedwell says. “We have to continue to advance the breed and make it better. We need all of the data.”

MyHerd: Revamped and Revitalized

Stacy Sanders, AHA director of records department, and Laura Loschke, AHA education and information services coordinator and assistant records supervisor, shared exciting news regarding MyHerd to the membership. Since May, the AHA has been working on revamping the existing MyHerd website. This action is in response to feedback from breeders regarding lack of speed and responsiveness to mobile devices.

The new MyHerd will not only be faster and mobile-friendly, but it will also include a variety of key functions to aid in usability. While many of the old navigation panels will maintain in the new platform, it is a completely new program.

“Think of it as a house,” Sanders says. “We’re not taking an existing house and remodeling it. We’re not adding a new kitchen or updating the bathroom. We’ve actually started from the ground up. We’re totally redeveloping it on a whole new platform.”

Sanders notes their priorities throughout have been serving the needs of the membership. To increase speed, the Association has dedicated resources for new hardware specific to MyHerd. This update will omit the competition MyHerd currently has while housed on a server with other programs. Additionally, the new system boasts larger fonts and a cleaner design. Sanders and Loschke agree these attributes together provide a modern, more intuitive program for users.

However, while it is mobile friendly, it is important to note it is not a

separate application. “You do have to be online, whether that’s your mobile data or your Wi-Fi,” Sanders explains. “It is mobile friendly in that you use a web browser to access it. It senses you’re on mobile browser, and it automatically rescales things for you.”

Loschke says to keep in mind it is never going to be desirable to sit down and enter a hundred registrations on a cellphone, but the capability is available. “More importantly, it gives you really easy access while you’re traveling to release an AI certificate to somebody in need of it or transfer that animal that you forgot about really quickly on the fly,” she explains. “You don’t have to be at home, sitting in front of your computer to get all that done.”

When working through registration and transfer work, the new system boasts several new functions, including transferring and requesting DNA tests on multiple animals, automatically populating fields, and the ability to create animal lists by filtering criteria. Further,

Loschke points out the expanded capabilities within personal lists.

“Currently your personal list shows you anybody that you’ve done business with in the last three years,” Loschke explains. “In the future, we’re adding the ability to tell you specifically the business that you did with that person. We think this will be really helpful if you got a call from a guy, he’s coming to visit your farm, and you need to go back and look and see what he bought from you in the past.”

The first test herds for the new system initiated in September. Since then, AHA staff have received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Before the official launch, Sanders and Loschke plan to increase the number of test herds to uncover any problems with the new functions. After the program is cleared, all members will receive an email to create an account utilizing an email address and password. Existing MyHerd accounts will not automatically transfer to this system. Additionally, the office will

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Sanders and Loschke pique excitement by unveiling the new MyHerd system to Hereford breeders.

no longer have access to passwords. Users will have to utilize the “forgot password” function on the site to get their password.

“Just think of it, on any other account you use online, you don’t use your account number to sign in,” Loschke notes. “You always have to use a username and a password. This just makes it a little harder for anybody to hack in, and it increases security on the site.”

Consistent with the old program, there can be multiple logins per account. For example, a ranch account can have logins for both spouses and all children. Further, MyHerd users will have the ability to view which user completed the registration work. All this culminates to minimizing the number of clicks and work required in the old system.

“The million-dollar question is when is the new MyHerd coming

out?” Sanders says. “Hopefully, we’ve piqued your interest and we’ve got you excited about it. I wish we could tell you we were ready to roll it out next week. We’re not quite there yet. We are looking at a planned launch at the end of January of 2019. If we feel like it’s right and ready and timing would be able to support a rollout and a launch, if we can support that, if it’s a little earlier than that, we will definitely do it.”

Modern Marketing: Redefining the Sale Catalog

Hereford Publication Inc. (HPI) staff members unveiled an online sale catalog feature available through the AHA that will streamline the efficiency of catalog production. The new catalog, dubbed Herefords On Demand, will showcase “live” expected progeny differences (EPDs) updated on a weekly basis and offers users the ability to search for EPDs within and between catalogs.

Caryn Vaught, HPI production manager; Alison Marx, HPI advertising coordinator; Sam Albers, HPI creative services coordinator; Joe Rickabaugh, AHA director of field management and seedstock marketing led the presentation on the cutting-edge features of the new format. Also in attendance was Joey Betzen, director of production with Propaganda3, who previously worked with the AHA on its new website design.

In a nutshell, Herefords On Demand will allow individuals to build their own sale catalogs. Using the new MyHerd platform, which is set to roll out by the end of January 2019, users will log into their accounts to begin work on their catalogs. After inputting sale and lot information and selecting from three predesigned layouts, users will work with HPI staff to customize the final product.

Albers guided attendees through a simple four step process of creating a catalog. Each step outlined the details of how to input information, organize lots and attach supplemental photos, videos and documents. After entering all their information, users will select the design template of their catalog. There will be three predesigned layouts to choose from, or users can opt for a custom template designed by HPI or an external party. An

important factor to note is that live EPDs are only available through the predesigned templates.

At any point in the data entry, users have the option to hit pause and save their progress. This means catalogs can be created as quickly or as slowly as needed. For an added hourly cost, information can also be sent to HPI for staff members to input.

Marx then navigated attendees through the user dashboard display, the online catalog display and the search functions. Through the AHA website, anyone will have the ability to search catalogs for animals based on registrations numbers, sale name, location and date, and for desired EPDs. They also have the option to share the catalog via email and social media.

“This option is practical for all herds, regardless of whether you’re selling five animals or 500 animals,” Marx says. “It really makes the playing field equal because you’re hosted on the AHA site. It streamlines the efficiency of catalog production.”

Rickabaugh wrapped up the presentation by discussing prices. The pricing structure for Herefords On Demand is a \$450 set-up fee with an additional \$15 per lot charge. A \$50 per hour production charge will be added if HPI staff needs to do additional work on the catalogs.

“This feature will give you big exposure,” Rickabaugh says. “The searchability and the updated EPDs are really powerful and will help breeders of all sizes market their cattle and promote their sales.”



HPI staff rolls out an exciting new way for Hereford breeders to develop a unique online sale catalog.

Continuing the Tradition: Positioning the *Certified Hereford Beef* Brand for Success

Amari Seiferman, *Certified Hereford Beef* president and CEO, led a panel discussion featuring: David Trowbridge, Gregory Feedlots, Inc.; Wes Steimel and Jason Robinette, National Beef Packing; Shane Bedwell, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement; and Jack Dupree, Sysco Virginia vice president of merchandising. These experts from different segments of the industry discussed their function in the beef industry as well as their perspective on the *Certified Hereford Beef* program changes.

Seiferman addressed the group first by announcing the transition from a blended program to a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Choice program, effective Jan. 1, 2019. "By improving the quality grade and by being able to put the USDA shield on there, we're able to open up new markets," Seiferman explains. "We're able to compete against the 91 other USDA programs that are in the industry today, that we have to face daily. This change is allowing us to be more competitive and to be able to open up doors of opportunity."

By eliminating the classic program, *Certified Hereford Beef* is positioning itself for maximum success in the marketplace. Seiferman predicts these changes will remove brand confusion, provide a consistent brand message, improve partner options and ultimately increase the demand for Hereford genetics in the marketplace.

The panelists agree *Certified Hereford Beef* is slated for tremendous growth in the next several years. However, this growth is impossible without the diligence of Hereford breeders to produce the highest quality beef for consumers. Bedwell applauds Hereford breeders in their improvement on economically relevant traits such as the *Certified Hereford Beef* index, marbling and carcass weight. As a breed advantage, Hereford cattle excel in tenderness and juiciness, however, marbling has traditionally been lacking.

"We have that marbling there, and now we're bumping up the quality grade to Choice and higher," Bedwell remarks. "I think producers should just keep on doing what they are



Certified Hereford Beef® staff and industry representatives alike are excited for the program's growth potential due to increasing the quality grade program specifications.

doing. Hereford breeders have an excellent product, and now as we upgrade to Choice and higher we can take it out there, we can say, 'It says choice on the box, now try this and see how good it is.'"

Today, those characteristics coupled with increased expectations from the program and the dry-aging process on carcasses, provide a product with immense value to consumers. "When you have a breed specific program, and it has a grade statement that tells everybody exactly what it is and lets them sell into that next level, it makes my life a lot easier," Steimel explains. "I think it brings some consistency to the program, and it brings some more validity into the program. A lot of what we're able to do comes from what Hereford breeders are doing in increasing the marbling of those cattle."

Because of this growth, anything meeting the specifications at National Beef is going into the *Certified Hereford Beef* program. Steimel says there is a clear demand for the product, and National Beef has even approached their board about increasing the premium for Hereford influence cattle going into the program.

Today, Robinette reports cattle are receiving a \$2 premium if they meet the specifications, and he anticipates that will grow as demand for the product increases. As a cattle buyer, he has seen improvement in Hereford genetics from a grading and quality standpoint. For him, the reality Hereford genetics can meet an upper two thirds choice requirement makes his job easier in buying cattle.

From the fed-steer perspective, Trowbridge compliments Hereford breeders on bringing genetics to his feedlot with the ability to qualify for these premium programs. Because his goal is to not only maximize performance of cattle from a pounds perspective, but also maximize the financial value of the cattle, this incentive to increase quality in the *Certified Hereford Beef* program is exciting. "We're looking at this in the feeding industry as a positive move to move forward with more demand, thus creating more value for the cattle that we're raising," he explains.

It is critical to remember Hereford breeders play a key role in increasing demand. Seiferman reminds producers to demand the brand in the grocery store, restaurants they frequent, and other retail outlets. Seiferman and the panelists agree consumers today want to know where their food came from, and they want to know the story behind the meat they're eating or the food that they're sourcing. *Certified Hereford Beef* is in a unique position to provide that experience to consumers.

"We work with producers throughout the country, not only doing farm-to-table tours, but as we're doing *Certified Hereford Beef* program launches or program dinners," she says. "We will be reaching out to breeders in those respective areas, and they have the ability to be able to enlighten people on our side of the industry. Being able to connect that story to a final product is very powerful." **HW**