

Rising to the Challenge

Seedstock producers must continue to seek innovative genetic selection tools to ensure profitability in the beef industry.



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In December, the 11th Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Genetic Prediction workshop was held in Kansas City, Mo. The conference focused on developments in genetic evaluation software and selection indexes. On the first day, breed associations discussed how they have incorporated genomics into their genetic evaluations. Shane Bedwell gave a great update on the American Hereford Association's (AHA) genetic evaluation process which utilizes Biometric Open Language Tools (BOLT) technology.

Imperative improvements

This month, the AHA also celebrated its one-year anniversary of having released our updated genetic evaluation and selection indexes. At first glance, the updates to the selection indexes were perceived to be directly related to the change in the genetic evaluation. In reality those updates were due to the addition of new economically relevant traits (ERTs) and to changes in economic factors and values of expected progeny differences. Those changes were imperative because of the addition of these ERTs: Dry Matter Intake (DMI), Sustained Cow Fertility (SCF) and Carcass Weight (CW).

In the past there was a misconception that more is always

better, and the seedstock industry is, perhaps, guiltier of this belief more than other industries. We have maintained that producing more was the sole driver of profitability and did not consider the possible antagonisms of this approach. For instance, the unintended consequences of producing more pounds at weaning are an increase in mature cow size, a decrease in fertility and an increase in maintenance requirements. So, do input costs associated with increased weaning weights offset revenues generated by selling heavier calves? I am sure most of you address those concerns each day, but it is always a good reminder to think about our customers' profitability as we make breeding decisions.

Leading the way

This workshop served as a good reminder that we cannot be complacent. The AHA has made huge progress in the areas of genetic improvement and management. However, we must continue to add and to utilize new tools to tap into new growth. The industry must move away from the "coffee shop talk" approach to progress and, instead, evaluate a program's true profitability.

The commercial industry will continue to move toward

crossbreeding, as it is the most efficient and economical approach to adding longevity, calf healthfulness and efficiency into a cow herd. The AHA continues to prove the value of Hereford genetics in crossbreeding programs. Next, the seedstock industry will need to look closer at generational intervals and determine the most advanced tools that will allow for reliable genetic selections. For instance, as a seedstock producer, are you ready to implement a systems-approach strategy to selection and to institute a breeding program encouraging in vitro fertilization (IVF) flushing virgin heifers?

These schemes may seem a bit complex to wrap our thoughts around, but we must remain at the forefront of our competitors. In turn, this challenges all of us in the beef industry to be progressive. As seedstock producers, the industry relies on us to make sound breeding decisions.

As we embark on a new year, I want to share a couple reminders: Please plan to stop by the AHA booth at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Trade Show during the 2019 Cattle Industry Convention, Jan. 30-Feb. 1, New Orleans, and mark your calendars for the 2019 BIF Convention, June 18-21, Brookings, S.D. **HW**