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The Common Denominator

Industry leading producers who have been recognized for bull management share insight on selecting an ideal sire.

by *Taylor Belle Matheny and Brooke Roberts*

Profitability and success in the cattle business are dependent on a multitude of factors, yet one of the most important is selecting the right bulls. As herd sires determine breeding decisions for seedstock producers and their cow herds, other beef producers are dependent upon these decisions when searching for their next herd bull.

Recognized for their excellence in breeding and marketing decisions, 14 Hereford breeders earned a prestigious spot on *BEEF Magazine's* Seedstock 100 list for 2018. The list identifies the biggest seedstock producers in the beef industry based on the number of bulls marketed in 2017.

While each producer selects sires and potential sale bulls differently, they all share a commitment to excellence, intensive

selection and management techniques, and a dedication to breeding cattle that perform for themselves and for their customers.

Their common denominator? Hereford genetics.

These breeders see the benefit of the Hereford bull in today's beef industry. From north to south and coast to coast, these producers have identified and understand the specific equation that yields success in marketing Hereford bulls in all parts of the country. As commercial cattlemen and purebred producers are looking for bulls to use in the upcoming breeding season, the following 14 Hereford breeders provide insight on bull management, selection strategies and marketing tactics.

3 Express Ranches

In the Southwest region of the country, where the first generation (F1) Hereford-Angus female dominates, Express Ranches breeds bulls that balance expected progeny differences (EPDs) and phenotype in a package that suits the needs of its customer base.

"A lot of our customers that buy Hereford bulls from us are using them to make black baldy females and take advantage of maternal heterosis," says Jarold Callahan, president of Express Ranches. "We try to look for balanced EPDs in combination with phenotype."

A firm believer in utilizing EPDs, Express Ranches looks for moderate birthweights, maximum growth and positive marbling and ribeye EPDs.

"If you have some discipline and incorporate EPDs and numbers into your selection criteria, you will benefit," Callahan says. "It's not everything, but it's important in our opinion."

Callahan also evaluates phenotype, specifically structure, when selecting bulls. Express Ranches' customer base has shown an increased interest in pigmentation, and Callahan has increased selection pressure for pigmentation in an effort to meet the needs of his customers.

"One of the first things we try to do is service the customer," he says. "There's a lot of places people can go buy bulls, so we try and offer them good service."

Customer service efforts at Express Ranches have included volume discounts, free delivery from sales and a first-breeding-season guarantee. Callahan believes servicing customers requires the sale of quality cattle and the elimination of problem bulls from sales.

"The product that we try to sell is the upper end of our population," he explains. "It's the genetics, the phenotype and the convenience traits. That's what we're trying to accomplish."

25 Langford Land & Cattle

Strict selection criteria and customer service characterize the bull business at Langford Herefords of Okmulgee, Okla. Owner Watson Langford believes a functional cow herd, a commitment to his selection decisions and listening to his customer base have all aided in successfully positioning Langford Herefords as "the largest total private treaty seller of bulls in the country. We sell more Hereford bulls and more baldy-hybrid bulls than anybody in the country," he says.

"We have to run a super functional cow herd that will breed back every year and raise a big, fat calf," Langford explains. "You keep the best females that are your type and kind and don't ever give them a second chance. If you're that strict on your females, over time they will do the right thing, and do the right thing every year."

When selecting bulls, Langford's calves must first meet two criteria — they must be born between 55 and 89 pounds and wean off at more than 600 pounds at 200 days or less. Beyond that, calves must be "his kind" — big, stout, long and easy-fleshing — which is the kind his customers purchase solely through private treaty sales.

"I like selling all the bulls privately," Langford says. "I get to personally know all of our customers, ride around with them and find out what they're trying to do with their own cow herd."

Listening to his customers gives Langford confidence in knowing his cow herd is headed in the right direction. Whether customers run 20 or 2,000 cows, Langford values their opinion and uses it to guide his breeding decisions and to remain steadfast in his stringent selection techniques.

"You have to really stand behind your beliefs in what you're trying to do," Langford says. "If you do those things, you'll be in business a long time."

23 Shaw Cattle Co.

Known as "The Bull Business Brand," Shaw Cattle Co. is a family-owned operation located in Caldwell, Idaho. Keeping its customers in mind is important when selecting sires to use and, ultimately, bulls to sell.

"We don't single-trait select anything because most of our customers are in big desert country," says owner Sam Shaw. "Structure, feet and legs are very critical to most of our customers, but on the other side they need to have moderate birth weights, be above average for growth and have added carcass value."

When Shaw's grandfather, Tom Shaw, began raising Hereford cattle in 1946, he wanted to breed bulls that would work. With a fourth generation now in the mix, that same principle still holds true.

"We use a lot of proven bulls that are five, six or seven years old in our AI [artificial insemination] program," Shaw says. "It gives our customers more satisfaction in knowing what they are going to get."

Realizing that cross breeding is essential in all sectors of the beef industry has made Herefords marketable for Shaw Cattle Co.

"Most of our customers use cross breeding in some way chasing the black baldy female," he notes. "They are wanting to get black baldies back into the herd."



29 McCabe Genetics



A key business approach behind McCabe Genetics, Elk City, Kan., is a focus on customer service. Keeping that goal in mind, when the McCabe family decided to add a second breed to the ranch, they elected to market Hereford bulls and have done that for the past 10 years.

McCabe bulls graze on high quality forages and are supplemented with a silage-based feed. "Our goal is to develop the bulls slower and to keep their feet and legs in better shape for longevity," says co-owner Randy McCabe. "We sell most bulls at 18 months and a few full 2-year-olds. We sell very few yearlings."

In recent years, the operation's marketing strategy has shifted to allow for more face-to-face

interactions with future customers. "We spend a lot of time on the road meeting potential customers and getting to know their operations," McCabe adds. "We try to assist customers in marketing their own calves and buy calves from our customers throughout the year."

The addition of Herefords to the operation has certainly been utilized by cattlemen looking to incorporate these genetics into their own herds.

"Hereford genetics are irreplaceable in making the most sought after crossbred females in our industry, which include the black baldy and the tiger stripe," McCabe notes.

34 BB Cattle Co.

At BB Cattle Co., Connell, Wash., performance and uniformity define each year's bull crop. Bill Bennett and his family believe bulls must first meet visual criteria before EPDs are ever examined. After passing phenotypic appraisal, bulls at BB Cattle Co. must also possess strong EPDs.

"We don't just buy numbers," Bennett says. "Their EPDs have to be as high as we can get and they have to look the part, too."

The herd bulls are managed individually, while the younger bulls run together until they are turned out to breed. Herd bulls are first exposed in a small pasture with about 35 cows, then are turned out with several other bulls and the rest of the cow herd in a large, circular pasture. For the last 10 years, every calf has been DNA-tested at BB Cattle Co.

Uniformity, coupled with performance and stoutness, makes a marketable herd bull in Bennett's eyes. "Our bulls are really uniform," he explains. "They're big and thick with lots of bone, and they've got reasonably good numbers."

The added performance, weaning weight and feedlot gain Hereford bulls can bring to a calf crop appeal to Bennett's customers. The combination of carcass merit, performance and uniformity has garnered success for BB-bred bulls.

Bennett says some of his customers harvest steers, and that one customer recorded "93 percent Prime and Choice, and 92 percent yield grade one's and two's" from a pen of 119 mostly-Hereford steers.



35 Buford Ranches

Meeting customers, understanding their respective programs and meeting their needs is a focus at Buford Ranches, Vinita, Okla. Sam Buford, owner, and Doug Branch, Hereford manager, make it a team effort to find new genetics for their herd that will work in a multitude of programs.

"When I am looking for a bull for both the registered and commercial ranch I am wanting a balanced set of EPDs, a bull that is phenotypically correct and a bull with a moderate amount of muscle, but yet soft in the middle with some stretch," Buford says. "If we like the way a bull looks when we visually inspect him, then we look at his EPDs to see if there is anything way out of norm that we need to be aware of."

Buford Ranches includes both a purebred and a commercial ranch which share a commonality in bull selection traits.

"I want to emphasize that criteria should not be different for the purebred ranch or the commercial," Buford says. "Likewise, when we sell a bull I think we should be trying to sell the same thing we would want to buy."

The bulls are slowly developed at the ranch before they are marketed private treaty to customers at 18 to 20 months of age.

"Our bulls are marketable because of what they are, the fact we stand behind them and because they come from Buford Ranches," he adds.

36 Hoffman Ranch

Hoffman Ranch in Thedford, Neb., earned its spot on the Seedstock 100 list by focusing on making stout, muscular Hereford bulls that never sacrifice structural soundness. Jason Hoffman, owner and partner, believes maintaining a balance of traits is crucial in ensuring the basics of the breed do not disintegrate.

While weaning dates may vary due to weather and grass quality, the number one bull management priority is to wean healthy bull calves and to get them on feed. Hoffman believes calves that know how to eat encounter fewer health problems as they mature. Bulls are further developed on a high-roughage ration before they are moved to grass for the summer, allowing for exercise and movement.

"We try to keep our bulls with enough flesh that they are appealing to the buyer," Hoffman explains. "But we also try and keep them hard enough to where they can adapt quickly to wherever they're sold."

Hoffman bulls are primarily marketed through a bull sale in February, with a select few large accounts and individuals buying through private treaty sales. Customers find value in the longevity and durability of Hereford bulls.

"A mature Hereford bull will get more cows bred than any other breed we've been associated with — they last longer, they're more durable and the hybrid vigor factor on black cows is huge," Hoffman says. "The long-term value of buying a Hereford bull greatly succeeds any other breed because of the longevity and hardiness of the cattle."



49 Knollcrest Farm

The overall reliability of their bulls and their genetic provider makes Knoll Crest Farm, Red House, Va., unique when marketing bulls. Hereford genetics have been a vital part for the operation and its customers dating back to 1944.

"The ability to cross breed with Herefords to create primarily black baldies that will enhance traits like survivability, overall performance and particularly maternal performance is important," says co-owner Paul Bennett. "Our Angus-based customers are wanting to utilize Hereford bulls to generate black baldies to capture the advantages of heterosis."

Knoll Crest Farm employs a list of important traits when selecting a bull that is marketable to its customer base.

"We select bulls that have a unique data set with respect to a unique combination of calving ease and growth, strong carcass merit and a combination of all traits," Bennett says. "In addition to that, hair coat, foot structure and integrity, fertility, pigmentation and overall phenotypic balance and completeness are extremely important."

A goal for Knoll Crest Farm is to produce bulls that are the total package scenario with EPDs that are amongst the best in the breed.

"Our goal is to develop bulls at a modest rate of gain, but still get enough flesh on them to market as yearling and long yearling bulls," Bennett adds. "Along with that, our customer service focus and guarantee is very important to us and our customers."



50 Krebs Ranch

The outcross-pedigreed cattle that call Krebs Ranch home in Gordon, Neb., are bred to excel in the showring and to perform in the pastures. Co-owner Ty Krebs builds upon generations of solid pedigrees to breed bulls that provide performance and soundness for commercial cattlemen, while maintaining phenotype and look for the showring.

"The kind that's competitive in the showring are still functional, real-world cattle that can go improve anybody's commercial herd," Krebs says. "To me, Herefords have the biggest advantage from the showring back to the real world."

Between 70 and 80 percent of Krebs' bulls are sold to commercial cattlemen, whose end goal is to put pounds on the scale in the fall. Bulls are made available through multiple sales and are also sold privately year-round. Customer demands include power, performance, moderation and structural soundness. Krebs' wide range of genetics have the ability to satisfy the needs of a varied customer base.

"I think the Hereford breed in general has a lot of good qualities that can go back and help a lot of these guys that still respect and admire a true F1 female in commercial herds," Krebs explains. "We've got the structural integrity in our cattle, we've got good feet, good performance and good milk."

51 Upstream Ranch

The Sandhills of Nebraska are home to Upstream Ranch, Taylor, Neb., an operation that sells bulls to commercial and purebred producers. When selecting herd sires to use on its cow herd, the bull buyer is kept in mind.

"I'm looking for complete, well-balanced bulls in their EPD profile, but I also want my herd bulls to be stout made with extra muscle shape and depth of body but still attractive phenotype," says owner Brent Meeks. "Cattle longevity is very important to our program so feet, disposition and udder quality are highly important."

The bulls sold in Upstream's February production sale are fall yearling bulls, which are born from the middle of August to the first of November and coming two-year-olds born from the middle of March to the first of June.

"Our commercial bull customers like the age-advantaged bulls for two reasons," Meeks explains. "One, they haven't been fed real hard so hopefully the bulls have extended longevity, and the second reason is due to the fact that some of these bigger cow-calf operations want older bulls that aren't over conditioned so that they can turn out in big pastures in tough conditions and get their cows bred."

Upstream Ranch strives to produce good cattle with solid numbers and is willing to stand behind the cattle.

"A Hereford bull's longevity, disposition and hardiness are reasons why our customers are using Hereford bulls in their cow-calf operations," Meeks says.

59 King Herefords

In the Southwest, King Herefords sells more than 400 structurally sound, feed-efficient, athletic bulls each year that can meet the needs of large ranches in the area. Bill King, owner and operator, is also a commercial rancher and feedlot operator and considers multiple factors in bull selection.

"I tend to look at a cross-section of things," King explains. "The most important thing here in the desert in New Mexico is that [the bulls] are structurally sound and can get out in the country and walk and eat grass and convert that into being a healthy bull."

After structural soundness, King analyzes carcass and performance EPDs in an effort to breed cattle that do well in the feedlot. Finally, King examines the pedigree and dam of each bull to ensure a well-rounded individual.

"I would say temperament, longevity, feed efficiency and heterosis are the four main things people look for in Hereford cattle," King says. "And Herefords give it to them."

The bulk of King's customers are ranchers that buy large numbers of bulls. This customer base prefers 2-year-old bulls that have been managed appropriately and are ready to be turned out.

"One of our keys is management," King notes. "We keep them out in rough, rocky country and keep them in athletic shape. That's what brings most of our customers back — the fact that the bulls are ready to go to work and cover a lot of country."

87 Colyer Herefords & Angus

Located along the Snake River 60 miles southeast of Boise, Idaho, the Colyer family has found success by selecting structurally sound bulls that can perform and travel in any part of the country.

"I think that bulls will breed as much to their phenotype as they will to their EPD numbers," says owner Guy Colyer.

"It starts with feet and legs and the ability to go out into big country and hold up and travel," he explains. "Combined with that, our bulls are able to sire calves that have additional pounds and performance and built-in carcass merit."

"We do pay attention to EPDs and select for a balanced set of numbers," Colyer continues. "We find that combination of phenotype and the genetic superiority of an EPD profile."

Bull calves are not creep-fed prior to weaning, as the Colyers place significant selection focus on cows with ample milk. Once weaned, calves are put on a high-roughage growth ration in an effort to develop basic growth and performance while also allowing individuals to display genetic variation. Large, sometimes rocky lots allow adequate exercise and help bulls develop their feet.

Nearly all of Colyer's Hereford bulls are sold in an annual sale. Because the Colyers avoid private treaty sales, customers find satisfaction and confidence in knowing the Colyers have their best bulls available on that specific day.

"I think that everybody who has bought from us in past sales knows that they're getting the top end of our bulls on that particular day," Colyer says. "They can buy with confidence knowing that they're buying the top end."

71 Jamison Herefords

To increase the predictability of performance traits, Jamison Herefords, Quinter, Kan., utilizes line breeding to give its customers an advantage. Selecting traits important to the Jamisons' market leads them to sell both yearling and 2-year-old bulls.

"Having a product the commercial customer wants and needs comes first," says owner Gordon Jamison. "Also having a strong warranty on soundness and fertility issues and always maintaining integrity in our relationship with customers."

The Hereford breed's versatile genetic abilities gives Jamison Herefords an advantage when marketing bulls.

Jamison notes, "Hereford adaptability to many climate extremes, the efficiency of the Hereford breed to respond to less than the best environmental issues and probably most important to many customers, the quiet and calm disposition of the Hereford breed as a whole" as major selling points.

"The majority of the nation's cow herd is black and Hereford genetics provide the best possible cross on most black cows," he adds.



99 Van Newkirk Herefords

Having started in the Hereford breed in 1892, Van Newkirk Herefords, Oshkosh, Neb., focuses efforts on raising uniform and consistent bulls. Refined over years in the business, the Van Newkirks use surefire strategy when selecting bulls to use in their cow herd.

"First, I find proven pedigrees I'm comfortable with that complement our base cow herd," says owner Joe Van Newkirk. "Second, the bulls need to be phenotypically pleasing to the eye with structural correctness and top end quality. Third, selecting for balanced EPDs, but also looking at their birth and yearling weights."

Bulls are developed strategically to perform in a breeding environment and to be more marketable to customers.

"Our bulls are raised and developed in the same environment our customers cows are," Van Newkirk says. "The Hereford genetics we use are tried and true for our use and our customers use." **HW**



Editor's notes:

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The complete 2018 *BEEF* Seedstock 100 list can be viewed at Beefmagazine.com/Seedstock/2018-Beef-Seedstock-100.