

Numbers Talk

Learn how profit indices can help you in sire selection this spring.



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In 2007 the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors initiated a program to recognize Hereford sires with strong traits associated with end-product merit. The Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) Sire of Distinction designation is given to those sires that rank in the top 25 percent of the breed for the CHB index (CHB\$) and have a minimum accuracy of 0.25 for both ribeye area (REA) and marbling (MARB) expected progeny differences (EPDs).

CHB\$ defined

CHB\$ is a terminal sire index built on a production system where Hereford bulls are mated to mature commercial Angus cows, and all progeny are targeted for Certified Hereford Beef® after the finishing phase. This index emphasizes carcass weight (CW) to ensure profit on the rail. As well, there is a positive weighting on average daily gain (ADG) and a negative weighting on dry matter intake (DMI) to ensure efficient pounds of growth in the finishing phase. Keep in mind this production system takes advantage of complementary breeding with the commercial Angus cow to allow for optimum end-product merit. This is the only index that does not emphasize fertility — remember, no replacement heifers are being retained.

Indices work

Sire selection can be a very difficult process. More than one trait can affect profitability, and in the past the beef industry focused on output without any thought toward inputs. Indices have helped producers understand more is not always better and have kept them from over emphasizing a single trait.

On the AHA website, a producer selecting for CHB\$ can find sires that qualify for the CHB Sire of Distinction and then sort them by the trait of interest. For example, breeders committed to MARB can sort bulls from best to worse according to MARB. Or,

you may have CW and MARB in check with your cow herd, and DMI is the trait that needs attention.

Indices have been developed over the years by breed associations and other entities — most have been developed on a breed-wide basis. These generalized indices are appropriate whenever breeding objectives are consistent across large segments of an animal population. Even though a dollar value may not reach reality at the ranch level, the ranking of the sires will still be strong and that is generally more important than the values themselves. Just find the good ones.

More than 20 years ago, my longtime friend, Roy Wallace of Select Sires explained how he used an index when selecting sires. At the time the math was simple, and the number of traits was not as robust. He selected bulls by identifying the traits of interest, then adding the percentile rank of all those traits and dividing by the number of traits. The lower the number, the better he liked the sire. He then looked at the bulls to ensure he preferred them on paper and that their structure fit his criteria. I utilized this math in my selection for many years, and because of this approach never overemphasized a single trait and stayed within a boundary for traits of economic relevance.

Hereford Advantage program

In addition to the CHB Sire of Distinction recognition, the AHA developed a marketing program for breeders to utilize for their customers who purchase bulls that excel for CHB\$. The Hereford Advantage program allows producers to market feeder cattle sired by a group of bulls whose average CHB\$ number is in the top 50 percent of the breed. This program serves to identify bulls that can add feedlot and end-product merit to a commercial cow herd. These programs provide a great opportunity to interact with your customers to develop a selection strategy committed to profitability. **HW**