



Sights on Success

**Tegtmeier Polled Herefords, Burchard, Neb.,
balances innovation and tradition to achieve consistency.**

by *Austin Black*

Russ Tegtmeier has seen it all. Every size of cattle and every form of marketing. His hard work, dedication and passion for Hereford cattle has allowed his breeding program to continue to evolve in an ever-changing beef industry. Tegtmeier Polled Herefords, Burchard, Neb., knows the key to success is providing proven genetics to commercial cattlemen.

It all started in the late 1940s with Russ' dad, Clarence. Farmers and ranchers dominated the countryside, and Clarence's neighbors were no exception. Headquartered in southeast Nebraska,

the Tegtmeiers were surrounded by cattle producers. "There was a farm on every quarter section and they all ran 25-50 cows," Russ says. There were some Herefords in the area, but most farms raised Angus or Shorthorn. Clarence saw an opportunity to differentiate his program, and he jumped on it. By raising registered Herefords, he could provide a crossbreeding option, and the docility of the breed was an added benefit.

His herd started with cows carrying Lamplighter and Beau Rollo bloodlines. With a strong foundation, it only took a few years for

Clarence to amass enough good cows to start selling bulls. His market started small, with most buyers coming from a 50-mile radius. But his honest dealings and confidence in the performance of his cattle allowed Clarence to build up a loyal customer base. Realizing demand for his cattle was growing, Clarence hosted the farm's first production sale in 1961. Clarence sold bulls and heifers, and his two cousins



Clarence was a visionary who knew furthering Hereford genetics in his area had immense market value for commercial customers.



Erick, Oscar and Clarence (l to r) hosted the Tegtmeier's first production sale in 1961, a tradition Clarence passed onto his son, Russ.

consigned a group of feeder calves. "It turned out to be a big sale for being on the farm without being held in a barn," Tegtmeier notes. "The sale was conducted like a farm sale with the auctioneer and ringmen going from pen to pen."

Following the sale, Clarence knew he had a solid market in place and began improving his genetics. "Throughout the '60s, Dad bought a couple bulls at the national polled Hereford shows," Tegtmeier says. "In 1965, he bought JCL Silver Misch 6th. He stood toward the top of his class at Nationals that year. He was one of the first nationally known bulls Dad had here." After introducing new genetics into the herd, the Tegtmeier program took off, and Clarence sold 50-75 bulls and about 50 heifers each year.

Uncompromising adaptability

In the '70s, more Continental and Exotic cattle entered the region — and industry dynamics changed. "The style of our cattle changed dramatically," Tegtmeier remembers. "We went from putting as much straw underneath the cattle as possible, to make them look shorter and deeper, to seeing how low you could lay to the ground to make them look as tall as possible in the picture." As producers looked to add frame to their cattle, the market for Hereford bulls became tough. In response, the Tegtmeiers adjusted their breeding program to meet the demand. "We changed and our cattle got more frame, taller and longer," he explains.

The trend was short lived, though. By the '90s, commercial producers were calling for moderation in birth weight and frame. The Tegtmeiers knew that to stay relevant in the industry, their program would need to adapt again. "We picked lighter

birth weight bulls and those that didn't have as much frame," he says, "and we weeded those large frame cattle out of our herd."

"We're looking at birth weight, moderating frame, doing more carcass testing and getting a more all-around breed of cattle."

— Russ Tegtmeier

In the aftermath of the large-frame trend, Tegtmeier's focus has not shifted much for the last 20 years. However, this consistency over the past two decades does not stem from a lack of progress or forward-thinking. Rather, experience has shown cattle with well-balanced traits will fit the needs of multiple customers. "We're looking at birth weight, moderating frame, doing more carcass testing and getting a more all-around breed of cattle," Tegtmeier notes.

Focused on progress

In 1983 Clarence passed from a sudden heart attack. As his closest partner on the cattle operation, Russ became the ranch manager. Committed to raising the best genetics possible

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Early sales for the Tegtmeiers looked a little different with ringmen and the auctioneer traveling from pen to pen to sell cattle.

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while honoring the legacy his father had created, Tegtmeier went to artificial insemination (AI) school in 1984. “I could see a real need in being able to use a lot of bulls I couldn’t afford to buy,” he says. “To be at the forefront of anything, you have to try to use up-and-coming sires that excel in areas your bulls don’t.”

Tegtmeier takes a very strategic approach to AI. “We’ve tried to take a sire group of daughters and breed them to one bull. We got a lot of herd consistency by getting half and three-quarter daughters in the herd,” he explains. The benefits continued in the bulls, too.

Consistency is important to the operation’s success, as Tegtmeier’s customer base is mainly commercial cattlemen who are interested in investing in specific genetic lines. “To have a successful sale, if you can get several half and three-quarter brothers in the sale and they look good, the buyers will bid on more lots,” he explains. Having several bulls with similar genetics and phenotypes gives buyers opportunity to compete for each lot. “If [the buyer] likes 10 or 15 bulls and it takes him 10 bulls before he gets one bought, that will set a floor,” Tegtmeier says. “That’s what helps our sale more than anything is to have bulls that look alike.”

Tegtmeier’s innovative thinking did not cease with AI school, though. In the early 2000s, he pursued another development at the forefront of the industry and began using embryo transfer (ET) to replicate proven genetics.

“We’ve had some individual cows that we felt we should get more progeny out of,” he

says. ET was the quickest way to do that. But unlike most seedstock producers, Tegtmeier runs a very small ET program. “We maybe flush one or two cows each year,” he says.

Tegtmeier likes to find young females with newer genetics to replicate, and he tries to flush a different cow each time. “I usually have 10 to 15 cows each year to choose from,” he explains. Tegtmeier knows exactly what he is looking for in a female ET prospect — he only pulls from the top 5 percent of the herd and studies to make sure the cow excels in all production related traits.

“I’m looking for a moderate frame cow that doesn’t require a lot of inputs to maintain condition,” he says. “She has to have a good udder, good conformation and structure and a good production record.”

To better track production and performance, Tegtmeier records weights and calving intervals. He got his first set of scales in 1985. Running the sale barn, his dad was able to look at a calf and know how big it was.

“I was different,” Tegtmeier says. “I needed the proof in front of me. I needed to educate myself on which cows had better performance, and I needed to know how much better they were.”

Tegtmeier also participated in the Guide Lines Program, which the American Polled Hereford Association introduced in the ’80s. The detailed records helped improve herd performance through culling and sire selection. “In the mid-’80s, our weaning weights were only



An extensive AI program paired with a selective ET program allows Tegtmeier to consistently produce high-quality females.





Tank 45P was a game changer for the Tegtmeiers' genetic base. Out of this noteworthy sire came numerous nationwide champions and a strong base of replacements.



The Tegtmeier family believes in the value of helping others progress their operations. In addition to the 1987 Nebraska Hereford Tour (pictured), Tegtmeier Polled Herefords has participated in eight other state tours.

about 550 pounds,” he recalls — and that was with large frame cows.

“[Those numbers] told me I was going to have to get a little more performance and milk in our cows to have weaning weights in the 600-650 pound range consistently,” he says. “But the neat thing is now our cattle are a couple frames shorter and our weaning weights are just as good if not better.” Ultimately, Tegtmeier’s dedication to numbers and analytics has paid off in the long run.

Reaping the rewards

Over the years, Tegtmeier Polled Herefords earned a reputation in the Hereford breed. “We have been on nine Nebraska Hereford tours, the World Hereford Conference Tour, and won the Nebraska Breeder Award from the Nebraska Hereford Association three times in the last 30 years,” Tegtmeier says.

He credits the notoriety to the genetics he and his dad have produced. As Clarence and Russ focused on raising productive females, they added reputable herd sires to their lineup. Bulls like CT Rollo Hazford and NJW FHF 9710 Tank 45P are probably the most memorable. Clarence raised Hazford, a Beau Rollo x Lamplighter son, in the '60s. “Bulls produced from him sold to 10 different states,” Tegtmeier says. “That was pretty impressive for as many Hereford cattle as were in the country.”

Tank 45P raised several breed champions and drew international interest from semen buyers. “He had a different pedigree at the time than a lot of popular cattle. People were looking for an outcross,” Tegtmeier explains. He bought the bull from Ned and Jan Ward and later sold a semen interest to Topp Herefords. “Ryan Topp did as much as anyone in promoting him,” he adds.

But Tegtmeier does not see the genetics and awards as his sole reason for success. “It’s treating our



Half a century dedicated to the Hereford breed has come with great reward over the years.

customers right,” he says. “We have sold cattle and semen in 34 states, Canada, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand.” A vast majority of his business comes from repeat customers. “That’s worth so much to sell someone a bull every one to two years for 20 years,” he notes.

Passion for Hereford cattle is the past, present and future of the Tegtmeier family. By helping producers understand which genetics will fit their programs, the operation has its sights set on success. And, with a constant focus on new bloodlines, Tegtmeier Polled Herefords continues to lead the way. **HW**



The Tegtmeiers have developed a diverse customer base spanning across the U.S. and internationally into Argentina.