

A Look at the NRSP

A closer glance at the National Reference Sire Program's overall goals and benefits to producers.



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During the 2019 American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting and Conference, Olsen Ranch, Harrisburg, Neb., and Stahly Ranch, Cavour, S.D., were recognized for their 20-year commitment to the AHA's National Reference Sire Program (NRSP). Art Olsen and Mike Stahly, along with their families, have been instrumental in the growth of this program and received a commemorative from the AHA for their continued support. The program started as a collaboration with the National Beef Tenderness project through the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Data through all production phases were collected on the steer progeny including shear force testing for tenderness. In addition, the AHA used the birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight and carcass information in the genetic evaluation. After the Tenderness project, the AHA collaborated with other countries to test Hereford genetics through a linkage program. This program was to help with the study for a global Hereford genetic evaluation. Even though we are still working toward a global evaluation, the linkage program did help with the development of the current Pan-American Cattle Evaluation (PACE).

Program advantages

The NRSP has developed into the strongest young sire evaluation in the industry and continues to evolve as the AHA adds cows to the program and looks at additional measurements for both economically relevant traits (ERTs) and convenience traits. Olsen and Stahly Ranches have been joined by others from around the country including Simplot Ranch, Idaho; Mershon Ranch, Mo.; and Sandrock Ranch, Wis. Both artificial insemination and natural service sires are used. The NRSP has allowed the AHA to collect more than 10,000 real carcass records and more than 7,000 individual feed intake records, and, currently, the steer progeny are all DNA tested. In addition, all females at Olsen Ranch have been genotyped and will be used in the development of the genomic component to the maternal traits in the evaluation.

As breeding season nears, you can reference any of the NRSP results to help with breeding decisions including a "select if" portion on the animal inquiry at Herfnet.com. You will find the most recent results for the Olsen calves in this issue's Performance Matters column.

The AHA continues to grow and to support this program because it provides useful data that is used in the genetic evaluation to support the

expected progeny difference (EPD) profiles of sires. Data is added to the weekly evaluation as it becomes available. This is a great example of why the move to the weekly evaluation is so important. In the past the timing of data collection in these herds made it difficult to get new information added timely because of variations in calving, backgrounding and finishing. Those did not always work in harmony with the release of the genetic evaluation.

It has been fascinating to watch the impact of these herds. When I first started at the AHA, the data from the herds were loaded into the evaluation, but progeny performance by sire was not published. Obviously, the EPDs of the sires were reflective of the data, which is the most important role of the program. However, when you track the progeny performance over time, you see a lot of positive changes in Hereford cattle at all stages of production including calving ease, growth and end product along with efficiency, disposition and fertility.

The NRSP is critical to evaluate young sires and to find those which can make a difference in the areas of importance for your program and your customers' programs. It is an incredible source, and the AHA will continue to grow the program. **HW**