

HEREFORD WORLD

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For Breeders and Buyers

East of the Mississippi River, Hereford producers band together to offer quantity and quality to the market.

by Diane Meyer

At 9:30 on a Monday night, second-generation Hereford breeder Brent Lowderman and his wife, Kris, were greeted with 11 pairs of headlights as they pulled into the driveway of their Carthage, Illinois, sale barn. The semitruck lightshow was the result of three days and nights of putting on a 1,865-head feeder calf sale.

For the last 13 years, the beginning of January has brought much more than New Year's resolutions for Hereford breeders east of the Mississippi. Beginning in 2007, the Lowdermans have hosted the Greater Midwest Hereford Sale to market Hereford and Hereford-influenced feeders. The sale is designed to capture value for both breeders and buyers.

With nearly 20 years of experience marketing livestock, the Lowdermans recognized a need to market large quantities of quality red-and-white-hided calves to eliminate discounts for producers and to satisfy feedyard and packer demands for Hereford genetics. Working with American Hereford Association (AHA) fieldman John Meents and several Hereford breeders in the area, Brent and Kris have established a successful annual sale; this year, the number of head consigned increased by more than 20% compared to last year.

"With the Hereford sale, I'm in it for my producers because I know how much value that sale adds to the Hereford producers, and hopefully they

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After calves leave the farm, stressors like traveling and a new environment make them susceptible to multiple illnesses. It is recommended calves be weaned at least 45 days or longer before a sale to ensure they are healthy and continue to put on pounds.

understand how much value that sale adds to their calf crop,” Lowderman says. “If we sell those cattle in a regular sale, they’re going to be 15 to 25 cents behind the market. It makes all the difference when they’re weaned, vaccinated correctly, and sorted and sold in load lots.”

Strength in numbers

Being located far from central feedyards proves difficult for small, Eastern breeders to market Hereford feeders to buyers at a sound price. Beyond consistency and quality – which are still essential – cattle need to be marketed in bulk groups.

Iowa Hereford breeder and AHA Board director Bill Goehring, who owns a livestock market in Keosauqua, describes how the Carthage sale gives an edge to small producers who might otherwise have to sell their calves in larger consignment auctions.

“With the sale here in Carthage, producers have the opportunity to take their small groups of cattle of 20 to 30 head and blend them with groups of cattle from other producers and make uniform pot loads that are very attractive to potential buyers,” he says.

Goehring notes producers who feed cattle cannot justify hauling a load of 10 head for

hundreds of miles. “When they can come and buy a straight pot load, their cost of trucking is so much less per hundredweight or per head,” he explains. “A load lot at a time usually fills their pens more appropriately, and it also makes their cost of production much cheaper on the finished or on the background end.”

Hereford breeder Mark Stephens of Taylorville, Ill., has been involved with the Greater Midwest sale since its inception and has been in the registered Hereford business since 1983. At that time, he says, Hereford cattle did not have the growth and the performance they do today. Now, with breeders paying more attention to expected progeny differences and developing programs to increase marbling, ribeye and overall carcass qualities, Stephens says packers can see the value of Hereford cattle. “We are getting a premium for these Hereford cattle at this sale,” he says.

In preparation for the Carthage sale, Stephens groups cattle from eight breeders and brings them to Carthage in one truck. He also buys and backgrounds Hereford-influenced feeder cattle from reputable breeders in his area starting in August and September at weaning time.



Since 2007, Brent and Kris Lowderman have hosted the Greater Midwest Hereford Sale in Carthage, Ill. “That’s the only thing I’ve known with our family is the Hereford breed,” Brent says. “I live and die Herefords.”

“The advantages of coming to this sale [are], number one, it’s comingled cattle. They are weighed and grouped into semi-load lots,” he says. “If you take, for instance, five head of Hereford calves off your farm or ranch and you take them to your local sale barn, there’s no buyers there for Hereford cattle.

“I highly recommend finding a large Hereford breeder in these bigger states out east,” he continues. “Get [those cattle] on a truck and get them to a certified Hereford-influenced sale. It’s going to add value to your program. It’s going to improve your thought process as far as what type of bull you want to use on your commercial cows or your purebred herd.”

Fighting discounts on red-hided cattle at local auctions is what inspired the Lowdermans to get the sale started in the first place.

“The buyers like big bunches,” Lowderman says. “One reason we started this sale was for the smaller producers with Herefords to get better prices when they’re put in big groups, because that’s what the buyers like.”

Buying in bunches

Cattle buyer John Harms, who places cattle for feedyards across the country and sells approximately 800 loads a year, has been coming to the Greater Midwest sale for the last 13 years because of customer demand, he says. “Once we find sales that are working and people are having good results, we like to stick with them.

He finds value in numbers. “You need to have the numbers to get the price,” he points out. “If there was only 30 Herefords at, say, an-all black sale, they’d get discounted very hard. It helps all the producers all the way across.”

Harms says the yards he buys for want entire pens filled with Hereford or Hereford-influenced calves. “They’re wanting to take advantage of that premium and there’s a lot of people that like the docility of the cattle and they want something different than the blacks,” he says. “We need 120 to 240 head, and we can come in here and do that.”

He was impressed with the growth in numbers at this year’s sale, particularly in the six- and seven-weight calves. As he puts it, “pounds are our friends,” and he advises producers to keep the commercial man in the feedyard in mind at all times. Lowderman says most cattle sold at the sale land in feedyards and that those feedyards prefer cattle which weigh at least 550 pounds and up.

Beyond numbers, J.R. Hugo, who owns and operates a livestock market auction, feedlot and order buying service with his sister and brother-in-law, says he looks for top-quality genetics and health in the cattle he purchases. After buying cattle from the sale over the phone last year, he opted to attend in-person this year.

“The customers that I sold the cattle to had a great look,” he says. “I will be back again next year and try to buy more. Not only did the cattle perform, but the health was good also, so you’re two for two.”

Going two for two

According to Hugo, health protocol is of utmost importance to feedyard managers. He emphasizes, “We’ve got the genetics where they need to be. We’ve got the quality where [it needs] to be. Now it’s time for the health.”

He recommends bumping 45- to 60-day weaning dates up to 90- to 120-day weaning dates and giving two rounds of a modified-live vaccine and a pasteurellosis vaccine. “That’s what everybody’s looking for,” he says.

“In the industry nowadays it’s not about what the cattle make. It’s what they don’t lose,” he adds. “It’s a very, very big deal. You don’t have individual producers owning these cattle anymore. You’ve got corporates and they’re



After cattle arrive at Carthage Livestock Auction Co., they are sorted, weighed and re-sorted into uniform semitrailer loads. It took the entire crew at Carthage Livestock two days and nights to sort through the 1,865 head consigned in the 2020 Greater Midwest Hereford Sale.

volume people. They're out to buy a product that's consistent and a product that they can figure and bank on, and if they make \$5 or \$10 a head and handle several of them, you're home free."

To better illustrate his point, Hugo explains how calves in this sale have been stressed in a new environment for at least 48 hours and then are freighted anywhere from 400 to 700 miles and end up penned with 60 to 90 other "schoolmates," making them susceptible to all kinds of different viruses. Calves which wind up sick that have been properly vaccinated can get over illnesses and continue to gain weight. "That's what we're out for."

Proper health management is something Lowderman also stresses to producers. "Cattle have to be weaned at least 45 days, or they're not being accepted by anyone really," he says. "But especially the feedyards because the feedyards cannot dump a calf in there that's not weaned, or that has just been weaned for two weeks. And they have to be vaccinated very well to be immune to everything."

The pay off

And with every "Sold!" ringing through the mic from Brent's father, Jack, and brother, Cody, it was clear years of progress were bringing in the dollars on Jan. 6. With the addition of a favorable market turn on the mercantile exchange that day, the Hereford and Hereford-influenced calves sold at par and, in some cases, \$8 to \$10 higher than conventional cattle being sold at other markets in the area.

Goehring commends the Lowdermans and Meents for their efforts in coordinating the successful annual sale. A consistent buyer from the start, Goehring says he is confident purchasing cattle from Lowderman sight unseen because he knows what to expect when the cattle get to him.

"The producers [Lowderman and Meents] work with, they're very good at bringing cattle in that have had the right health program," Goehring praises. "They bring good quality

cattle, not carrying too much condition and flush. Past buyers are very aggressive at this sale, so that's a compliment to those producers that are bringing animals in here."

As one of these producers, Stephens compliments Lowderman and Meents for their promotional efforts in communicating with Hereford breeders and commercial breeders alike. "A lot of this trickles down to guys like myself that go to the barns and see the black calves that come in and we tell [buyers] about this Hereford breed and promote the breed," he says.

For Lowderman, the payoff is getting to work with producers to help them improve their programs. "I compliment the producers for doing a better job breeding the cattle," he says. "Several of my buyers keep saying year after year how the cattle, as far as the quality, has improved. And that stems back to the producers just making better cattle — and doing the health protocol right."

The quality of the red-and-white breed is recognized by cattlemen throughout the country. Out West, Lowderman says several cattlemen who attend the National Western Stock Show in Denver comment how the best cattle out there are the Herefords. "That stems back to the producers making these cattle better, so that reflects here selling the feeder cattle on this end, too — how good the Herefords really are," he says.

"We need to continue to strengthen the feeder-calf market for Hereford-sired cattle across the country and sales like the one today give producers that opportunity to produce a quality Hereford-sired animal that can have very close to the top of market value," Goehring says. "Producers that would sell these cattle in other sales wouldn't have the opportunity to reach that higher premium that they were able to achieve today."

A lot of legwork goes into making sure the quality and quantity are there come sale day. During the summer months, Lowderman works with producers to improve their calf crops and

also visits with feedyards and cattle buyers. Fliers are sent out to previous and potential consignors come late September, ordered tags are mailed back and a rough headcount is established in early November. With 93 different consignors representing 10 states in the 2020 sale, it takes a lot of organization to keep the veterinarian paperwork and tag numbers straight. Kris, who keeps track of all of the paperwork, says a lot of hours go into planning the sale on that end alone, but it is a necessary step — once cattle are comingled the tags are the only way to identify them.

"I wouldn't trade my ladies in the office for anything," Lowderman says of the process.

Once cattle arrive at the Carthage Livestock salebarn, they are watered, fed and weighed. With record numbers, this year's sale required two days of sorting and weigh-ins. The entire crew stays late into the night re-sorting the groups into semitrailer loads. Months of planning then culminate into a two-hour sale. Afterward, there is still plenty of work to be done — this year it took 21 semis until 3:00 a.m. Tuesday morning to load out every head.

For Kris the process is rewarding because it gives back to producers. "It's nice to see that Hereford breeders can benefit from the same value of their cattle and not be penalized for having a different colored breed," she says.

"I like going out and seeing the cattle on the farm and talking to the producers," Lowderman says. "Then you get the cattle lined up on the farms with the guys, and then you get them to the stockyards, and then you have to hop on the phone and talk to the buyers and tell them what you actually have coming in."

"It all stems from being honest with everybody, and that forms a good relationship with your buyers and sellers," he says. "I absolutely do what I love to do, and that's the cattle business." **HW**