

HEREFORD

The voice of the American Hereford Association | January 2021

WORLD

The Versatile Sire

First generation crosses with Hereford genetics create unrivaled feeder calves and replacement females.

by *Diane Meyer*

It's no secret crossbreeding results in more efficiency, longevity and maternal ability. In first generation (F1) crosses, cattle receive the biggest advantages from heterosis. In any environment, when it comes to developing quality feeder calves and a replacement herd, Hereford sires lead the way in adding value to various crossbreeding programs. Operations across the country have used the versatile Hereford sire to make improvements in their commercial herds.

Red ramp up

In northwestern North Dakota, 475 mother cows thrive at Enge Farm and Ranch in Stanley. Dylan Enger, his brother, Carson, and their uncle, Jim Enge, manage a commercial cow-calf operation of primarily Red Angus females and a small registered Red Angus herd. Their commercial cow herd is bred to Hereford sires with exceptional maternal and growth traits. The goal of this cross is to build a quality replacement herd.

At Enge Farm and Ranch, red baldies adapt well to North Dakota's harsh winters and dry summers. "We've been working to make the cows work for us, not us work for them," Dylan Enger says.

"We see higher gains in the steers and in the females. The maternal quality, udder structure and docility of the F1s far surpasses the straight reds in the long run," Dylan Enger says. "We're trying to produce quality cattle, and with the minimum inputs we have, the cattle work for us and do a really nice job."

The Enge operation switched to an all-red herd to differentiate from many neighboring operations developing all-black cow herds. At the time, Enger says their calves were not getting any extra kick, and F1 baldies sounded like an ideal fit to improve their calf crop. Soon, the operation began sourcing Hereford bulls from a handful of different states and the improvements were instant.

"Those calves hit the ground running," Enger says. "We started retaining some females, developing them and breeding them back to straight-red bulls. From there, the cows took off like nothing and they were in high demand."

The third-generation cattleman notes that true F1 baldies with the extra kick of heterosis have been increasing in popularity. While his initial plan was to breed red baldy females and sell them as breeds in the fall, the heifers turned out so well that he kept them. Recently, he discovered the American Hereford Association and Red Angus Association of America's joint Premium Red Baldy

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Enge Farm and Ranch has enrolled its red baldy females in the Premium Red Baldy program to add more value at sale time.

program as an added tool to market this quality cross. Enger says it was a “no brainer” to enroll females in the tagging program, since tags only cost \$0.99 each and their entire Hereford bull battery already qualified for the program.

All about gains

When it comes to getting the most out of an Angus cow herd, Weathers Family Farms in Yuma, Colo., has found the Hereford and Angus cross is second-to-none.

In 2012, Nathan and Nikki Weathers began building a cow herd and decided to go the commercial route after a year raising club calves. They purchased 135 Angus heifers and, after a set of first calf heifers hit the ground, started crossbreeding those with registered Hereford bulls. Nikki’s brother Danny Calderwood, who has his own small registered Hereford herd, says the change was “instant” in their first Hereford-sired calf crop.

“That first year they arrived 50 pounds heavier than the purebred Angus calves,” he says. “They were just bigger and better everywhere, from foot and bone to muscle to center body.”



The faces of Weathers Family Farms, Yuma, Colo. Pictured (l to r) are: Nathan, Ty, Nikki and Tenley Weathers, and Ashlyn, Allie and Danny Calderwood.



In western Colorado, baldy cattle at Weathers Family Farms gain noticeably more through weaning than their straightbred counterparts.

As those calves developed, they noticed outstanding gains through the weaning process. “With our weaning program, we’re beating three pounds a day in gain through the weaning process – it’s actually closer to 3.75,” Nathan says. “A lot of people don’t believe it, but we track the data. When you put the complete program together and you run efficient cattle, it can be done.”

Driven by numbers, Nathan, Nikki and Danny run their commercial herd like a registered herd. They collect as much data as possible from birth to harvest. They note that collecting birth weights requires close attention since the crossbred calves “get up and go,” especially calves out of F1 females. Carcass data is collected on steer pens to track sire groups. With this information, the Weathers know what each cow is raising and can select sires according to carcass numbers.

Like their data collection, they do not take any shortcuts when it comes to breeding. The cow herd is bred 100% AI (artificial insemination) and are exposed to cleanup bulls of the same quality as their AI counterparts. This quality shines through in the uniformity of every calf crop and in the efficiency of the cow herd. “Our breed up in the first 30 days has improved every year since we started using Hereford bulls,” Danny shares.

These efficient calves have weathered Colorado’s dry climate and drought with ease. Now, 240 cows graze on the family’s 1,500-acre farm in arid, high-desert country where annual rainfall is 12-16 inches. Even so, Nathan says they were able to pull pairs off pasture 30 days earlier than normal and “those calves never missed a beat and the cows looked phenomenal, even during one of the worst droughts I’ve ever seen.”

Nikki adds, “Our pasture gets six to eight months of rest, which is what it needs right now.”

When it comes to marketing these F1 baldies, the Weathers work closely with Ned and Jan Ward of NJW Polled Herefords, Sheridan, Wyo., and have consigned their front set of heifers in the NJW production sale for the past three years. They also sell cattle off the farm and have taken pens to the National Western Stock Show, where their commercial bred heifers captured reserve overall honors in 2020.

“Momma cow of the South”

Herefords have been king at Debter Hereford Farm, Horton, Ala., since the operation began in 1948. John Ross Debter, third generation Hereford breeder, owns and manages a cow herd of F1 Brahman and Hereford crosses.

In 2007, Debter purchased his first set of tiger-striped, open heifers. Today, that same set of cows is still producing quality calves. “I knew from research that the F1 Brahman and Hereford cross cattle were known for their longevity and their great mothering abilities.”

Debter crosses Brahman cows with Line 1 Hereford genetics to produce high-quality, well-dispositioned cattle. He sources stout bulls out of a feminine cow with good udder quality. “The Line 1 Hereford crossed with the F1 Brafords provides a good calf that is marketable to sell, both steers and heifers,” he says.

In the staunch heat of Alabama, Debter notes the F1s have a high heat tolerance and handle fescue well. “They have been called ‘the mamma cow of the South’ because of these qualities and they are just good overall brood cows,” he says.

Debter consigns these F1s to his family’s annual October production sale. He notes customers have been very pleased with their production and disposition. Plus, they’ve topped the sale a few times. “I wish I could produce them faster,” he says. **HW**



At Debter Hereford Farm in Alabama, the F1 tiger-stripe cow produces quality calves with high heat tolerance.