



Genomics

Don't Just Take Our Word for It

Hereford breeder John Ridder of Falling Timber Farm tells how genomic technology helps his operation.

by Jamie T. Courter and Leoma Wells

Hereford breeders can make more rapid genetic progress than ever before with genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs). The same science and data driving the breed's genetic evaluation also means commercial users of registered Hereford cattle can make selection decisions with increased confidence in the accuracy of genetic predictions.

Here, Hereford breeder John Ridder of Falling Timber Farm in Missouri discusses how he utilizes genomic technology in his operation. His sentiments mirror those frequently expressed by other breeders, including those with prior experience using genomic selection tools in other species.

Q What was your initial impression of genomic technology?

A: "I was selling dairy semen at the time genomic technology first became available to beef producers, so I was aware of progeny testing and how genomics helped to change the strategy of dairy breeders and accelerate genetic progress. When the technology became available for beef cattle, people were wary, but it was already commonplace in the dairy industry."

Q How and when do you implement genomic testing on your operation?

A: "We take DNA samples on every calf at weaning and file them away. Then in late

(Photo on opposite page) Falling Timber Farm, Marthasville, Mo., is owned and operated by John and Heidi Ridder (center) along with their children, Madi (left) and Ben (right).

August or early September we sort the cattle and decide which bulls we are keeping and submit DNA on those being registered. We try to have the DNA sent in by mid-October, so we are guaranteed to have the results back by the end of December in time to take pictures and place ads. The genomics help us decide which bulls to advertise.”

Q How important are the genomic results to your management decisions?

A: “It helps me to decide the final cut of who goes in the sale and who doesn’t. I’ve had some really good-looking bulls fall out of the sale because of their low calving ease numbers.

As far as the bulls I use for breeding, I won’t use one that hasn’t been tested. I breed based on numbers and phenotype. Because of genomics, I am also more comfortable using young ‘unproven’ bulls from my own herd. It seems like we can make progress much faster by being able to identify superior animals quicker than before we had genomics. What used to take five to six years, now we can know by the time they are yearlings with GE-EPDs.”

Q Do you believe there is increased value in your cattle due to having been genomically tested?

A: “Genomics is a big risk management tool. We see the value of genomics reflected in our customer satisfaction and repeat buyers. Having tested as much as we can, genomics help prove the bull is, in fact, a calving ease bull – and our customers know that. We don’t see a lot of bull credits or unhappy customers.”

Q What impact has genomics had on your operation since it was implemented?

A: “We put a lot of emphasis on growth. I can’t say I follow a trend line of the growth of my cattle, but I know we don’t feed like we did in the past. Today, we feed for moderate and efficient gain, which is part of our customer satisfaction. From a growth EPD standpoint, if we were plotting a trend line, I feel like we would be making huge gains for those traits.

I also know that udder quality on our females would rival any herd in the country, but that is also a result of a breeder putting accurate data in and being honest about what they’re scoring. The trait itself is a little subjective, but the longer you take measurements and select for it, the better the quality will be.”

Q Do you wish you had started genomic testing earlier?

A: “I feel like we were some of the earlier people to adopt the technology. We started with the bulls the first year it was available. The marketability and predictability of a bull’s performance for our customers was our turning point in adoption.”

Q What advice do you have to someone considering implementing the technology on their operation?

A: “I would tell them that if they want to be in the registered business and help with genetic improvement, it’s a necessity.” **HW**

Editor’s Note: Jamie T. Courter, Ph.D., is a beef products manager and Leoma Wells is the strategic account manager for Neogen Genomics.

Previous articles in this series discuss everything from utilizing genomics in selecting bulls and replacement females to the appropriate timeline for Hereford breeders to use when submitting samples to Neogen. To learn more, please contact an American Hereford Association team member.



Falling Timber Farm offers high-quality calving ease Hereford sires and elite females twice a year. While they have an Annual Bull & Female Sale the third Saturday in March, they also offer fall bulls and bred heifers by private treaty in the fall.

