

HEREFORD

WORLD

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Bull Buyer's Manifesto

Mike Hora adds heterosis, hardiness and carcass merit to his award-winning, carcass-oriented commercial cattle operation with Herefords.

By **Katie Maupin Miller**

Mike Hora keeps a single page of white letter paper at the ready. Carefully printed in red and green ink is what he calls his "Bull Buyer's Manifesto" — his bull-buying must-haves. This list is top of mind whether the 71-year-old cattle producer is paging through AI sire catalogs or standing in a pen of herd sire prospects. Regardless of the color, the breed, the price or the breeder, Hora's steadfast commitment to these priorities has moved his carcass-oriented commercial cow herd forward for three decades.

Nearly every calf Mike Hora, Washington, Iowa, sends to the packer from his commercial herd grades either Certified Angus Beef® (CAB) or USDA Prime, built with an Angus-based cow herd that relies on Hereford for heterosis and carcass merit.

None of this was the case when he sold his first load of cattle on a value-based grid and began a decades-long commitment to producing cattle that excel in the pasture and on the rail.

In the early 1980s, Hora slowly put together a cow herd, including some big Continental cattle. Most of his early cow

herd was Angus, Simmental and Gelbvieh cross. They delivered performance, but Hora's cows were getting too large framed and too hard keeping with too many calving problems. When he marketed his first set of home-grown fed steers on the grid a decade later, they graded so poorly he decided then and there to switch to Angus exclusively.

Switching to Angus helped his carcass performance, but Hora felt the straightbred cattle were leaving performance on the table. He searched for a breed that could complement his primarily Angus cow herd without sacrificing the carcass quality he had been striving to achieve. He found that answer in the bald-faced breed.

Hereford advantages

"I always wanted to use Hereford cattle. I absolutely love Hereford cattle," Hora says. "I firmly believe in the value of heterosis."

That added heterosis, or hybrid vigor, helped strengthen not only his cow herd but also his fat cattle. Hora says the

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Hora Prime Beef: Bull Buyer's Manifesto, Mike Hora

1. Must have EPDs.
2. DNA is required. Tenderness DNA is Required.
3. Carcass ultrasound.
4. Complete weights & ratios.
5. Cutoat info from sibs/contemporaries. Breeder needs to have fed out his own cattle.
6. I prefer inbred bulls with calculated inbreeding coefficients.

Frame score 5.5

Hereford-influenced cattle could do everything their straightbred counterparts could do in terms of carcass and maternal traits. For Hora to invest in a potential sire or replacement female, regardless of the breed, the genetics needed to be on par with his current cow herd's carcass prowess and additive in nature. Hora has found



Mike Hora's baldy cows are hardy, fertile and fescue tolerant. Hora appreciates the American Hereford Association's emphasis on udder quality and says his Hereford-influenced females have excellent udders.

Hereford genetics that can do just that while adding extra docility, growth and fescue tolerance.

When selecting Hereford cattle, which will work in his operation, Hora prefers bulls with actual ultrasound data showing an intramuscular fat (IMF) 8 or higher with a 15-16-inch ribeye and an appropriate amount of backfat to produce high-yielding steers, yet easy-fleshing replacement females. Hora prefers to do business with multi-generational breeders with similar goals to his operation — producing efficient, carcass-driven cattle in a sometimes-challenging fescue environment. Hora buys from breeders who feed their own cattle, because he likes to see the real-world carcass data straight from the rail to back up any genetic claims.



Hora's Hereford-influenced steers reap the economic advantages of hybrid vigor without sacrificing carcass quality. His mostly straightbred Angus steers were leaving some performance on the table. Their bald-faced peers easily grade and yield as well or better with added performance and hardiness.

Hora Prime Beef: Bull Buyer's Manifesto

by Mike Hora

1. Must have expected progeny differences (EPDs).
2. DNA testing is required with added tenderness genetics emphasized.
3. Carcass ultrasound.
4. Complete weights and ratios.
5. Carcass cutout information from siblings/contemporaries. The breeder needs to have fed out his own cattle.
6. I prefer inbred bulls with calculated inbreeding coefficients.
7. Frame score 5-5.5.
8. Originated from a fescue operation.
9. Prefer breeders who are multi-generational with objectives the same as mine.
10. Genetics have excellent dry matter intake (DMI), rate of average daily gain and feed efficiency. Bulls fed on the GrowSafe system are preferred. **HW**

“Get your own skin in the game. Send your own cattle to the packer and sell them on the grid — let me see what they can do,” Hora says.

For the past several years, Hora has found Hereford genetics, which meets his manifesto's demands, at Ellis Farms in Chrisman, Ill.

These criteria are essential for a small cow-calf producer who retains ownership and feeds cattle — so is the added boost of performance and hardiness provided by heterosis.

“Heterosis, of course, is free. People who don't use it are leaving something on the table,” Hora says. “The Angus boys will say that they have so many different bloodlines that we can get heterosis within the Angus bloodlines. Well, I can't get that from them because I'm already using every prominent carcass bloodline.”

What Hora could get from Hereford was a total outcross in an era of popular half-blood and percentage seedstock with shared ancestry between breeds.

“If you look at Hereford genetics, they're really the only breed that isn't related to anything else,” Hora says.

Along with heterosis comes a particular brand of Hereford hardiness, or as Hora says, “good ol' range cattle toughness.” The same vigor that helped Herefords dominate the range and High Plains in the days of cattle drives helps producers like Hora make more money with efficient, hardy cattle.

Top grade

In Hora's program, his profit comes on the rail. While he sells a few replacement females and bred heifers at a premium due to their proven carcass genetics, most of Hora's livelihood is derived from his fed cattle.

He markets his fat steers on the grid at Tyson in Joslin, Ill., and National Beef, Tama, Iowa. More than two-thirds of each load he sends qualifies for CAB and Prime carcass premiums. For a cattleman with just 200 cows to make his living in the sometimes-volatile beef business, Hora says his fed cattle must garner these premiums to keep his operation in the black.

“That's what we have been getting paid for,” Hora says. “Prime in recent years has averaged \$20-40 a hundredweight. You're looking at more than \$300 per head premium. That is what I'm after, and that is what I think that a lot of Hereford breeders need to shoot for.”

These added premiums are what Hora strives for with every load of fat cattle. He hopes to one day see a load of 100% Prime cattle.

Hora's small herd already garnered national attention and made headlines when he earned reserve in the 2005 National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC). Winning was impressive, but the consistency of Hora's 40-head entry was nearly unfathomable.

Hora had to use every steer he had to participate. Without a single sort, his fed cattle



Cindy and Mike Hora and their herding dog, Jitka, work daily to care for their 200-head cow-calf operation and the steers they retain to feed. At any one time, the Horas have about 500 head of cattle on their Washington, Iowa, farm. The couple uses a strict set of selection guidelines to purchase bulls capable of moving their award-winning commercial-oriented cow herd forward, and they love adding Hereford genetics to increase heterosis and hardiness while ensuring carcass performance.

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— Mike Hora

were that year’s NACC cutability champions with more than 62% Yield Grade 1 and 2. His entry was the third-highest in overall contest grid value, with 70% CAB and 15% Prime.

In the 15 years since the contest, Hora’s carcass figures have only improved. Recent carcass data shows loads that include more than 70% Prime cattle, with loads often rolling more than 85%, and even up to 96%, Prime and CAB. An average load of Hora’s cattle will grade around 66% Prime with about 40% Yield Grade 1 and 2.

By utilizing electronic identification (EID) tags, Hora uses the carcass data from his cattle to review his sire selection. Now, he is even starting to cull his mature cow herd based upon their calves’ carcass performance, in addition to fertility, feet and legs, and udder quality. Hora hopes to own only Prime-producing mature cows in the not-so-distant future.

Besides cattle he sells on the grid, Hora capitalizes on his operation’s consistently Prime grade cattle by selling 20 head of locker beef locally as Hora Prime Beef. Hora is so

DESCRIPTION	HEAD	WEIGHT	1/WT	\$/CWT	VALUE	DOLLARS
BASE PRICES:						
STEER	22.0	16760	100.0	177.00	29679.36	
TOTAL HEAD AND WEIGHT	22.0	16760			29679.36	
PREMIUM:						
PRIME	16.0	12418	74.1	12.00	1490.16	
Y2	2.0	1400	8.3	2.50	35.00	
CAB	5.0	3638	21.7	3.00	109.14	
					1634.30	
DISCOUNT:						
Y4	6.0	4513	26.9	(12.00)	(542.04)	
					(542.04)	
					0.00	
TOTAL VALUE					30771.62	
DRESSED COST:					(18) .51	

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DESCRIPTION	HEAD	WEIGHT	1/WT	\$/CWT	VALUE	DOLLARS
BASE PRICES:						
STEER	28.0	23012	71.1	188.00	43262.56	
HEIFER	13.0	9339	28.9	188.00	17657.32	
TOTAL HEAD AND WEIGHT	41.0	32351			60919.88	
PREMIUM:						
PRIME 73%	30	22786	70.4	20.00	4557.20	
Y2 12%	13.0	9753	30.1	2.50	243.83	
CAB 15%	6.0	4726	14.6	8.00	378.08	
					5179.11	
DISCOUNT:						
Y4	5.0	4087	12.6	(12.00)	(490.44)	
1051/OP	1.0	1089	3.4	(35.00)	(381.15)	
					(871.59)	
STAND:						
					0.00	
					0.00	
TOTAL VALUE					65127.40	
DRESSED COST:					(201) .31	

Most of the Hora family's income is derived from marketing their fed cattle. Premiums garnered on a value-added grid are imperative to the operation's bottom line. Regularly, around two-thirds of every load of fat cattle will roll Prime. Hora appreciates Hereford genetics' additive nature, as the outcross genetics they provide to his cow herd increase hardiness and carcass merit.

confident of his genetics, he offers a satisfaction money-back guarantee to each of his local Prime beef customers.

Whether his cattle are marketed on the grid or sold as local locker beef, Hora strives to produce 100% Prime cattle in his modest feedlot, a goal he continues to move closer to.

Hora hopes to maybe slow down a little someday — perhaps take his first day of vacation or show one of the cow-horse-bred Quarter Horse colts he raises. In the meantime, he'll keep demanding more from the genetics he uses, driven by his must-have bull-buying priorities. **HW**