

Focus on Cow Efficiency

Maintain breed advantages sought by commercial producers.



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Spring and the Easter season are here, and many of us are finishing calving season and preparing for summer breeding. This is when we get our first glimpse of our previous breeding decisions in both the current calf crop and the initial production of first-calf heifers.

For many seedstock and commercial producers, this season also offers an opportunity to reflect on herd performance, program goals and which traits to maintain and improve.

Focus and progress is obvious when you consider how Hereford breeders, in total, continue to improve traits of economic relevance. For instance, this issue of *Hereford World* highlights the maternal side and recognizes the latest Hereford Dams of Distinction (DOD). This issue also recognizes the most recent Hereford Sires of Distinction (SOD). As many will agree, a good sire will most likely have some good cows in his pedigree.

Earning DOD or SOD recognition is demanding. Among the strict criteria, Dams of Distinction must maintain an efficient calving interval and possess a nursing ratio that sets them apart from their contemporaries. Sires of Distinction must produce daughters that have earned at least seven DOD awards. When an animal achieves DOD or SOD status, you will see the designation after their name when you submit an animal or expected progeny difference (EPD) inquiry on Hereford.org. You can search the American Hereford Association (AHA) database for Dams of Distinction and Sires of Distinction.

Driving maternal progress

Over time, the genetic trend for Hereford maternal traits continues to be positive. As an example, since 2012, the genetic trend increased 133% for Calving Ease Direct, 33% for Sustained Cow Fertility, 8% for both Teat and Udder, 26%

for the Baldy Maternal Index (\$BMI) and 27% for the Brahman Influence Index (\$BII). These gains are even more incredible when you consider the breed's positive genetic trends for growth and carcass traits. This underscores the focused commitment of Hereford breeders and the fact that simultaneous progress can be made even among antagonistic traits.

Hereford's genetic improvement positions the breed positively for the future as the cattle and beef industries seek ways to become more efficient in the growing and finishing phases and the cow-calf sector.

Research already proves that adding Hereford genetics to a commercial cow herd increases fertility, longevity, docility and efficiency. So, these advantages also position Hereford positively in the sustainability conversation.

With all of that said, we need to stay committed to the traits that have gotten us where we are in these areas. As the breed's genetic trend for growth increases, we're also seeing a similar trend in Mature Cow Weight, which has increased our genetic trend for Dry Matter Intake. When incorporating these traits into our \$ Index Values, it can be argued that our conversion is still very positive, but these are things to keep in mind moving forward in order for Hereford to remain the breed of choice to complement other breeds that have focused mostly on end product value and growth.

Buyers are paying strong prices this spring for Hereford bulls, Hereford-influenced bred heifers and replacement females. The future is bright as the AHA builds on current genetic progress and continues to research ways to prove the value of Hereford genetics.

I wish everyone a very Blessed Easter. **HW**