

Stacking Maternal Lines

Cow families can be herd cornerstones.

by *Wes Ishmael*

Bulls may drive genetic progress, but cows make it possible. “As many good cows as you can stack in one pedigree, the more predictable the calves will be,” says Kyle Pérez of Pérez Cattle Co., Nara Visa, N.M. “Every breeding decision is based on producing the best female possible. In return, when you raise that next great breeding bull, he has the maternal strengths to carry a herd forward.”

Conditions in northeast New Mexico, where the ranch is located, range from semiarid to arid. Cows and bulls must cover sprawling country. That helps explain the program’s focus on moderate-framed, easy-fleshing cattle that are sound and correct in their structure.

When Pérez Cattle Co. expanded its purebred Hereford program, while maintaining its

commercial herd — both are managed the same way — Kyle focused on finding proven, balanced females with the ability to produce a superior calf every year.

The Pérez cow herd gained added consistency, quality and production with the injection of NJW 73S 980 Hutton 109Z. Kyle explains the bull’s dam, NJW P606 72N Dreamday 73S, is arguably the most productive Hereford female in the breed.

Next came the purchase of NJW Mighty 79Z 22C 49C. According to Kyle, the production, strength, udder quality and overall consistency gained from his dam, BW 91H 100W Rita 79Z, and her cow family, is second to none.

“We started crossing those bulls to each other’s daughters, which puts those cows in the calf’s pedigree two and three times. That’s the only way you can get consistency,” Kyle says.

Another cornerstone cow family at Pérez Cattle Co. revolves around KJ DWE Sheila 457Y, one of the top cows in the Jensen Brothers program at Courtland, Kan. Kyle believed her maternal strength and elite phenotype were unmatched when the Pérez operation acquired her.

“This was proven when she was named U.S. and Canadian National Champion Female,” Kyle says. “Her production has been second to none as her sons continue to top our sales and her daughters continuously find their way to the donor pen. In our past three National Champion pen of females, over 75% have been direct daughters or granddaughters of Sheila.

“I have 30 cows that go back to her. This past year, we flushed eight direct



Pérez Cattle Co. utilizes cow families to help accomplish their goal of making the best cow possible with each mating.

daughters and granddaughters of her. We dive in and flush earlier than some people. I don't have a problem flushing a 2-year-old out of a proven cow like that."

Keep in mind, cows pay the bills at Pérez Cattle Co. Every dollar earned comes from the cow herd.

"You have to be a student of the game to move yourself forward. The cattle have to be balanced on the ground and on paper," Kyle believes. "Stick with a program. When we decide to use a bull, it's with the goal to retain 40-50 daughters out of him. When you get half-sisters and three-quarter sisters across the ranch that is when you get your uniformity."

Identifying cow family prospects

"First, you have to decide whether you have the cows in the herd or do you need to go find one. I've never been too proud to say I need to go somewhere else for improvement. If I need it, I'll try to get it," Kyle says. He'll look everywhere, no matter the herd size or name recognition.

"You have to be honest with yourself and not barn blind. If something's not working, the worst thing you can do is to keep doing it," Kyle says. "If we buy a bull and he doesn't do exactly what we want, we'll shuck him off and move on. You have to be honest with yourself and your cow herd. If they're not doing what you need them to do, move on."

Rather than mate an individual cow to an individual bull, looking to correct deficiencies and accentuate positives, Kyle finds more success in mating a bull's pedigree to a cow's pedigree.

"AHA gives us useful tools like total herd reporting where you can see a cow's lifetime production and the mother's lifetime production," Kyle explains. "Sustained cow fertility is something a guy needs to look at. We want cows that can stay sound and still be producing at 8, 9, 10 years old."

Incidentally, when Kyle shops for a bull, his decision is made way ahead of sale day, after he's gone to see the bull's dam and maternal relatives still producing in the herd, whether the calf is natural or ET.

"Our breeding philosophy is driven by raising the ideal female," Kyle emphasizes.

A few years ago, he was talking with a valued, long-time commercial customer and exceptionally smart cowman. The conversation veered toward increasing weaning weights. The customer explained he was more interested in developing better females than getting heavier calves. He viewed the steers as his operation's culls, whereas the replacement females provide the foundation

to build from for generations to come.

"That truly is where the value is in the commercial sector, the replacement females and improvement of the cow herd," Kyle says. "You can go buy \$10,000, \$12,000 or \$14,000 bulls, but at the end of the day, they're just half of the equation. You have to have the strength in the cow herd to really push the bottom line."

"These females need to be productive. You need moderation, a big-ribbed female that has fleshing ability, a strong and a useful udder that has longevity. You need these females to be maternal in their look and broody in their design, and sound in their structure." He notes how many dollars it takes to raise a bred heifer, get the first calf on the ground and then get her rebred without skipping a beat, year after year.

"So, when you get these females to last in a herd 8, 9, 10 or 12 years, those are truly the free dollars in the industry," Kyle says. **HW**

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