

The Multiple Answer Breed

Hereford adds carcass quality and industry sustainability.



Jack Ward is the executive vice president of the American Hereford Association. He can be reached at jward@hereford.org.

“God said, ‘I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board.’ So, God made a farmer.”

That’s from radio broadcaster Paul Harvey — who made “The Rest of the Story” famous — when he addressed the National FFA Convention, during President Jimmy Carter’s term. A Ram Trucks’ Super Bowl ad shared the message again in 2013.

I recall Harvey’s message often and think of how resilient, tough and committed cattlemen/cattlewomen are as caretakers of God’s creation while supporting their local businesses, schools, etc.

The month of May — National Beef Month — also provides a timely opportunity to reflect on beef’s importance as the center-of-plate consumer choice and a critical component of a healthy diet.

A single, 3-ounce serving of lean beef provides essential nutrients and about 170 calories, according to the U.S. Beef Board. Nutrients include high-quality protein, zinc, iron and B vitamins.

Producing more with less

There are approximately 700,000 cattle farms and ranches in the U.S. with an average herd size of about 43 head, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture. More than 91% of these operations are family owned and operated.

Cattle production consistently accounts for the largest share of total cash receipts for U.S. agricultural commodities — about \$391 billion or 17% in 2021. The U.S. is the largest beef-producing nation in the world, accounting for approximately 19-20% of the global beef supply each year. According to USDA data, there were nearly 721,500 beef industry jobs in

2016, which paid workers more than \$10.8 billion in employee compensation.

All of this value starts with the fact that cattle (ruminants) are natural up-cyclers. They convert human-inedible forage into high-quality protein, which humans can consume. Plus, improved genetics, management and technology enable the same level of beef production as 40 years ago, but with about 33% fewer cattle.

This is a compelling sustainability story to share with beef customers (retailers and food service) and beef consumers. Cattle provide positive net contributions to the environment, the carbon footprint and profitability. Hereford genetics provide unique opportunity in each of these areas.

Research and experience document Hereford’s positive contribution in commercial crossbreeding systems through inherent breed strengths, as well as heterosis. Hereford and heterosis improve docility, fertility, longevity, the number of calves born and pounds weaned per cow exposed. They also reduce feed and water intake. All of this increases production efficiency, which contributes to both environmental sustainability and profitability.

Beef quality, too

Hereford is also an answer to growing consumer demand for the high-quality beef emulated by Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB). As supplies of premium USDA Choice and Prime grading cattle increase, consumers continue to pay more. You will find a special CHB section in this issue highlighting the brand’s growth and innovation.

Hereford breeders have the opportunity to continue growing demand for Hereford genetics by focusing on both end product and maternal traits.

In closing, as Memorial Day approaches, special thanks goes to everyone serving our country now and in the past. **HW**