Performance Matters

ART and Progress

by **Shane Bedwell**

Have a plan, work it and work it some more.

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Spontaneous, creative thought sometimes helps us catch the proverbial lightning in a bottle, but sustained success is typically borne by deliberate plans backed by committed execution.

Consider the extraordinary progress Hereford breeders continue to make in specific economically relative traits such as weaning weight, yearling growth and carcass quality. Also, keep in mind the growing recognition in the marketplace regarding the breed's strengths and uniformity.

This progress stems from deliberate selection by breeders who have open access to the most elite Hereford genetics. These elite genetics can help achieve a variety of production and marketing goals.

Progress is also associated with applied reproductive technologies (ART) including AI and embryo transfer (ET) that enable accelerated progress and move the needle quicker by turning generations over faster.

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Table 1: Registrations of AI and ET Calves

Year	AI/ET
2012	25.7%
2013	26.5%
2014	28.3%
2015	29.6%
2016	31.3%
2017	31.9%
2018	32.7%
2019	32.8%
2020	32.9%
2021	32.8%

AI and ET registrations increase

You can see Hereford breeders' steadily increasing use of ART in the registrations of AI and ET calves (Table 1). Registrations of these calves increased 27% during the last 10 years. Also, it is interesting to note that roughly 82.4% of calves from an AI or ET mating are registered compared to 69.4% of non-AI, non-ET calves.

Part of the difference in registration percentages is due to the fact that AI and ET calves typically are born earlier in the calving season and likely are out of a herd's top females. Undoubtedly, increased ART use and the growing number of registrations for calves produced by those means also suggest breeders are finding more value in them.

For the many opportunities ART provides, it's important to keep in mind safeguards that will keep your breeding plan on the road and out of the ditches. I'm not referring to a busted synchronization program. I'm talking about maintaining a firm grasp on key fundamental traits such as soundness, disposition and eye pigment. These traits continue to help the breed flourish, although they are not currently part of the AHA genetic evaluation. That is in addition to utilizing performance predictions offered by expected progeny differences (EPDs) for the traits that are evaluated.

With more than a third of annual registrations produced by ART matings, it is likely a majority of these genetics are closely related. This reality should not discourage you from utilizing AI or ET. However, it emphasizes the need for deliberate mating decisions aimed at specific goals. It also underscores the need to identify outcross genetics that can keep moving the breed forward.

Have a plan, work it and work it some more.

Keep them sound and have a happy Fourth of July! HW