

Historic Hereford Opportunity Ahead

The nation's cow herd can rebuild with increased heterosis.



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

Commercial cow-calf producers used more Hereford bulls in recent years, based on transfers through the American Hereford Association (AHA) and the increasing average bull price reported by the Association. Lots more opportunity lies on the near horizon.

When the widespread drought finally ends, commercial producers will likely grow the national herd back at least to where it was in 2019, when current ongoing herd liquidation began. That means adding back approximately 2.5 million beef cows and the bulls necessary to breed them.

High feed costs, narrower profit margins and societal focus on the carbon footprint of cattle underscore the need to expand the herd with increased production efficiency. The logical solution is more crossbreeding to capture the documented benefits of direct and maternal heterosis. Hereford's inherent breed advantages make the cattle an essential complementary crossbreeding component. Hereford advantages include docility, efficiency, fertility, longevity and sustainability.

Proven efficiency

Over the last two decades, the AHA invested in research to document the value of heterosis in the commercial cow herd through all stages of production, when Hereford genetics are used as a complementary crossbreeding component.

Current, ongoing AHA research examines more comprehensively the value of maternal heterosis associated with Hereford-sired F1 females.

Fertility traits are lowly heritable in beef cattle, so crossbreeding is the quickest, most effective way to increase reproductive efficiency. The Hereford-sired F1 female has more fertility, longevity, docility and efficiency, which adds cow herd sustainability while increasing pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed.

The AHA will continue to document the value of the Hereford-influenced female through research, data collection and 'big data' analysis. The Association will continue communicating findings with members, commercial producers and the industry.

Serve customer needs

Hereford breeders have the genetics to expand market share as the nation's cow herd rebuilds, but it will require more than that.

AHA members will need to continue to be stringent in their breeding programs and utilize all available tools to provide the genetic merit commercial producers demand as they expand their cow herds. Breeders need to maintain their commitment to collecting phenotypic data, utilizing genomics and being good stockmen and women. Breeders must understand the genetics that fit customer environments. Within unique environments, most commercial producers want bulls that create efficient, sustainable replacement females, as well as steers and terminal heifers that offer value to the cattle feeding and beef packing sectors.

We need to continue to emphasize the value of efficiency and optimums rather than chasing maximums. We need to understand the tools we have that help make selection decisions more reliable.

Share the facts

Finally, capturing this historic opportunity demands AHA members deliberately share with customers, prospective buyers and the beef industry common messages associated with Hereford's value, and the value of the F1 Hereford female, specifically.

AHA members will receive "Historic Opportunity Now" with the December issue of *Hereford World*. It outlines seven key messages to share, along with additional information and context. **HW**