

EARNING OPPORTUNITY

EDUCATIONAL FORUMS HIGHLIGHT HEREFORD'S BRIGHT FUTURE.

Hereford genetics are enviably positioned to grow market share during a unique time in U.S. beef industry history.

That common thread was woven through many of the educational forums during the American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting and Conference held in October in Kansas City, Mo.

When the current drought ends, producers will likely expand the national beef cow herd by at least the 2.5 million cows liquidated since 2019. These additional cows will require approximately 83,000 bulls. Static to declining metrics associated with profitable commercial cow-calf production support the industry building back with increased heterosis.

Deliberate, strategic genetic improvement during the last two decades earned Hereford the opportunity to provide the industry with more heterosis and production efficiency.

Exploiting the opportunity

“At the end of the day, strategy is about earning the right to win ... We don't get it, we aren't given it, we earn it through our blood sweat and tears,” explained Kevin Ochsner, president of Agcellerate. He led participants through the development of AHA's new five-year strategic plan, which he helped facilitate, along with Tom Field, director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska.

You can find the AHA Strategic Plan at [Hereford.org/strategic-plan](https://www.hereford.org/strategic-plan).

Ochsner framed the introduction of the strategic plan with key issues and trends the AHA Board of Directors considered. They include:

- Increased supply chain integration and coordination. There will be more people developing and

breeding cattle for specific markets and systems.

- Increased investor, governmental and consumer focus on sustainability.
- Continued growth in demand for high-quality beef.
- Growing importance for data and information to document how cattle are bred, managed and valued.
- Continued consolidation in the cow-calf sector.
- Revolutionary advances in genomics, gene editing and reproductive technologies.
- Growing relevance of the U.S. dairy herd.
- Increasing demand among commercial cattlemen for services and support beyond high-quality genetics.
- Growing industry-wide recognition of some of the risks and limitations of straightbred cattle.

These issues and trends led to critical assumptions, including:

- Demand for heterosis will increase.
- Optimums will be more important than maximums.
- Research will be critical to document and substantiate claims.
- Beef quality will continue to improve.

Leading in efficiency and sustainability

“Document, communicate and improve Hereford's sustainability story,” is one of five core strategies in the plan. Shane Bedwell, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement,

joined Kin Stackhouse-Lawson, director of AgNext at Colorado State University (CSU), to share current AHA research and its value to the breed, as well as the broader U.S. beef industry.

Bedwell explained ongoing AHA research efforts to document the breed's inherent genetic efficiency advantages and their magnification through direct and maternal heterosis. He also highlighted the recent initiation of a collaborative research project with CSU to enhance the understanding of the genetic differences in seedstock relative to enteric methane production and nitrogen excretion, a byproduct of rumen fermentation.

While sustainability is multifaceted, Stackhouse-Lawson emphasized greenhouse gas emissions and their role in global warming are currently the primary focus of consumers, lenders and investors.

Relative to the carbon footprint of cattle, Stackhouse-Lawson explained, “I believe the biggest potential is in selecting the low methane producing cow. Why do I think that? Because when we put cattle on feed, on the same diet, there is a 10-15% difference in methane emissions. So, I think it is the long-term play. But we have to make sure you remain profitable in every other trait. We cannot give to get in the methane space ...

“I'm proud that you have taken a leadership role. I think this is an incredible opportunity to own the space and frankly to help this broader industry in a big, big way.” **HW**

Editor's Note: Overviews of each educational forum are being developed for use by AHA members and the industry.