

Genetic and Management Distinction

Recognizing elite Hereford females and the sires behind them.



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Efficient, fertile and productive females are the foundation of successful seedstock and commercial herds. Building cows that breed and produce a superior calf on time year after year demands both reliable genetics and management prowess.

The American Hereford Association (AHA) Dams of Distinction (DOD) program, highlighted in this issue, recognizes such females and the efforts behind them. Females earn recognition based on data submitted through the AHA Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program. These females emulate the original vision of the breed — more production-efficient females that can build more pounds of quality beef with fewer resources.

Every seedstock producer should strive to make females like these that will satisfy the most discriminating stockman — structurally correct, sound feet and legs, good udder quality, fleshing ability and easy disposition, along with calving ease, optimal growth, optimal milk, efficiency and end product merit.

In turn, sires — often out of elite dams like these — are the bedrock for building foundational females across a herd. AHA's Sires of Distinction program, also highlighted in this issue, recognizes sires that have produced at least seven DOD.

Hereford is essential

U.S. cattle producers have done a remarkable job of increasing genetic potential for post-weaning calf growth. This potential, coupled with technology and feedlot management, continues to fuel more pounds of production per cow in the national inventory.

Likewise, industry use of genetics that can produce USDA Choice and Prime carcasses — often through straight-breeding — is behind resilient consumer beef demand.

However, production data also suggests this terminal, end-product focus and pursuit of high-quality, high-growth cattle has come with the unintended consequence of stagnating or depressing ranch-level profit-linked production performance, such as cow fertility and pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed.

That's why Hereford opportunity has never shone brighter for individual producers and the collective industry.

Hereford cattle arrived in the United States in 1817 to provide efficient production, high beef yields and sound reproduction. The breed's inherent advantages are tried and true across decades. They include fertility, longevity, feed efficiency, production efficiency and disposition.

Coupled with complementary crossbreeding, these advantages power the kind of direct and maternal heterosis that can turn the tide of lost ranch production performance. Years of industry-wide research document the advantages of crossbreeding systems.

Plus, commercial producers can maintain or improve average carcass quality when crossbreeding with Hereford genetics because of the positive genetic trends established by dedicated Hereford breeders.

Hereford has a unique opportunity to help rebuild a more efficient and productive U.S. cow herd, which requires the industry to raise the bar on maternal traits.

I recently reviewed papers from the Beef Cattle Type Symposium at Oklahoma State University in 1988. The late Harlan Ritchie, distinguished professor in the Department of Animal Science at Michigan State University, was one of the presenters. Always insightful, Dr. Ritchie shared a quote from U.S. President Thomas Jefferson. It captures the confidence and boldness that fortune so often favors: "I prefer the dreams of the future to the history of the past." **HW**