



Post-Pasture Learning

Hereford Feedout Programs continue to grow interest and value.

by *Wes Ishmael*

“We would all love to identify that one bull that does it all — easy birth weight, his cattle all grow, and they all grade well and feed well,” says Lee Mayo, general manager of HRC Feed Yards, Scott City, Kan. “The only way to get the information needed to identify that bull is by testing the genetics. That’s what these programs are about.”

Mayo refers to the American Hereford Association (AHA) Hereford Feedout Program¹ and the National Junior Hereford Association Fed Steer Shootout². Both provide Hereford breeders and commercial users of Hereford genetics the opportunity to send a few head or entire pens to feed at HRC Feed Yards. Participants learn more about the cattle feeding and beef packing sectors while collecting performance data from their cattle.

“As a registered breeder, we just needed to do it, and all of the stars aligned this year,” explains first-year participant, Matt Beery of Beery Land and Livestock (BLL), Vida, Mont. “We’re hoping to bring this information back to our bull customers and say, ‘Here’s how your bulls’ younger brothers do in the feedlot and as carcasses.’”

The BLL program includes both seedstock and commercial herds. The Beerys utilize AI intensively to build bulls their customers want.

“Our specialty is working with commercial cow-calf producers trying to produce large groups of closely related genetics,” Beery explains. “We sell lots of half-brothers and three-quarter brothers. Ninety percent of our Hereford bulls go on black Angus cows to make them better. We push to our customers the value of the F1 and using Hereford bulls on their black cows.”

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Mike Beery, Vida, Mont.

BLL ends up with 100 or so Hereford and red baldy steers each year. They background the steers and market them as feeder calves weighing 800-900 pounds. No matter how good the cattle, or the method used to market them, Beery says the cattle are often discounted because they comprise mixed loads — Hereford and red baldy — rather than a straight load of one of the other.

Beery sent 54 straightbred Hereford steers and 52 red baldy steers to feed and evaluate at HRC. While also a marketing decision, more than anything, he says it is the chance to see how his cattle

perform in the feedlot and on the rail, to improve his program and help the Hereford breed.

Currently, 94 participants from 22 states are feeding more than 1,400 head of Hereford and Hereford-influenced feeder cattle at HRC Feed Yards.

Hands-on learning

Beery took advantage of the annual Fed Steer Shootout Field Day April 15 to visit HRC and see his cattle.

“I wish more people could see this side of the business and understand it. I wish I could have had 50 of my commercial producers with me that day,” Beery says.

“When I showed up, all of the cattle across the yards were so clean and so well taken care of. I was so happy to see what Lee is doing. It’s just a win-win for us, for the breed and all of the way through.”

Mayo and his crew welcomed more than 100 participants and guests to the field day, which included intensive informational and hands-on educational sessions, including the following.

- A talented team from Cargill Protein North America led producers through rotations, including a carcass cutout demonstration, along with focuses on beef quality and consistency, carcass defects and cattle hide value points.

- Corbin Stevens, DVM, HRC Feed Yards consulting veterinarian, performed necropsies and showed participants the difference between healthy bovine lungs and those scarred by respiratory infection.
- AHA staff led participants through the ins and outs of live market cattle evaluation including estimating grade and yield to arrive at value differentiations.
- Kevin Good, CattleFAX vice president of industry relations, provided an overview of current cattle markets and the drivers behind them.
- Gregg Barfield, president, BlockTrust Network, and Mike John, MFA Health Track manager, introduced a new information sharing system fueled by blockchain technology.

“The field day continues to strengthen the overall program,” says Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs. “Our hands-on approach to education brings a lot of value to the experience. Once program participants also come to the field day, everything comes full circle for them.”

“I am so happy the Association is providing a program like this, doing something to get some numbers back that we can take to the commercial industry,” Beery says. “Lee Mayo also deserves a great deal of thanks for providing this opportunity.”

Tracing value

Current participants are also the first, on a voluntary basis, to be part of a collaborative pilot program testing the efficacy of blockchain technology to share data from pasture through the packing house. AHA, HRC, BlockTrust Network and National Beef LLC are partners in the project.

“You have more value points associated with the genetics of these cattle on feed than I’ve ever

seen. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a feeding trial of this size with this much complete data attached to it,” explained Mike John to field day participants. He is manager of MFA Health Track, a process-verified preconditioning program.

John deals with 600-700 producers who enroll approximately 40,000 head in the MFA Health Track program each year. Each head is identified with a unique identification number, tied to an RFID tag. In turn, individual animal information is tied to each number.

“We know when they’re born, when they were weaned, what they were vaccinated with and all of that kind of data,” John explained. “The problem is that the average producer size in our program is about 65 head. Nationwide, 70-80% of the beef cows are in herds of less than 50 head. When those cattle go to market, most of them go to auction because of the size of producers’ drafts. Those cattle get dispersed, and the information is basically gone.”

president of the BlockTrust network. The system maintains the integrity of each data point associated with unique RFID numbers.

John has been working with Barfield, using Health Track data to ensure the system’s utility within supply chains.

In simple terms, think of block chain as an electronic ledger. Throughout the lifetime of each individual head of cattle, information associated with its unique RFID number can be added by whoever has permission to add the data. Those contributing the data grant permission for others to view the data. It’s fraud-proof and permanent. It also creates a road map by which those involved can see where value accrued and potentially share the value.

“This opportunity you have with the genetic data, the growth data and carcass data is very rare. It’s an amazing opportunity for you to get some really important feedback to your genetic programs,” John told the crowd.



Cattle producers of all ages shared and learned during the Fed Steer Shootout Field Day at HRC Feed Yards, Scott City, Kan. Pictured (l to r): Justin Dauer and his two sons, John and Jacob, Panhandle, Texas. John and Jacob have cattle on feed at HRC.

Unless individual animal data accompanies an animal throughout the supply chain, it has little value, no matter its potential to add value. In the case of MFA Health Track producers, data has been collected on about 1 million head so far but could be used only sparingly to verify value added to the cattle.

Enter BlockTrust, a block chain system created by Gregg Barfield,

Mayo summed up the many opportunities at the outset.

“Everyone, every day can produce the champion beef animal. That’s a Prime Yield Grade 1. Everyone has a shot at being a champion every day,” Mayo says. “There aren’t many of those champions in the country today, but that should be the goal. How do we get there? And how do we create that animal where its mother still does a good job on grass, yet her calf converts well, gains well and performs well in the feedyard and then does that on the rail? That’s the idea, and we’re all striving for it.” **HW**

¹ Hereford Feedout Program — participants enroll a minimum five head of same-sex (steer or heifer) cattle for feeding within a designated delivery period; participants can enroll whole-pen groups outside of designated delivery period.

² NJHA Fed Steer Shootout — participants enroll individual steers or pens of three steers.