

Collaborate, Innovate and Be Responsible

Three pillars of good business can set producers up for generational success.

by **Will Fiske**

For decades, genetic evaluations have relied on performance data — thorough pedigrees, progeny data and accurate record keeping. The American Hereford Association (AHA) and its members have invested in genetic selection tools and performance predictors to be precise and reliable. The historical size and scale of this type of collaboration orchestrated by a member-led organization is quite an accomplishment. Hereford breeders were collecting data and leveraging it for monetary value long before today's talking points about data-driven management were even conceptualized. By capitalizing on the value of data by reporting it to the AHA's genetic evaluation, breeders are better able to predict the future performance of their most vital asset — the registered Hereford cow.

Look back before looking forward

Pondering the future often causes us to reflect on the past. Reflecting on the history of the cattle business frequently leads us to recall “the good ol’ days,” when it seemed like simpler times. The commercial cow-calf producers were purchasing their Hereford bulls locally. Most feeder cattle were sold at sale barns, and a scale and a good eye were all that drove genetic improvement in the industry. But was it really that simple? Was it easier? And were those days truly better?

Hindsight is 20/20. It's easy to simplify the past knowing how the future unfolded. It's a mistake nearly everyone makes. The reality is, the obstacles generations before us faced were comparably as tough to overcome as the challenges breeders face today.

The beef industry has steadily encountered more than its fair share

of challenges — drought, sickness and a multitude of other financially detrimental events. But for centuries, cattlemen and cattlemen have earned their reputation for working hard to survive the toughest of times and being resilient in the face of the unknown, to continue and even thrive amid chaos.

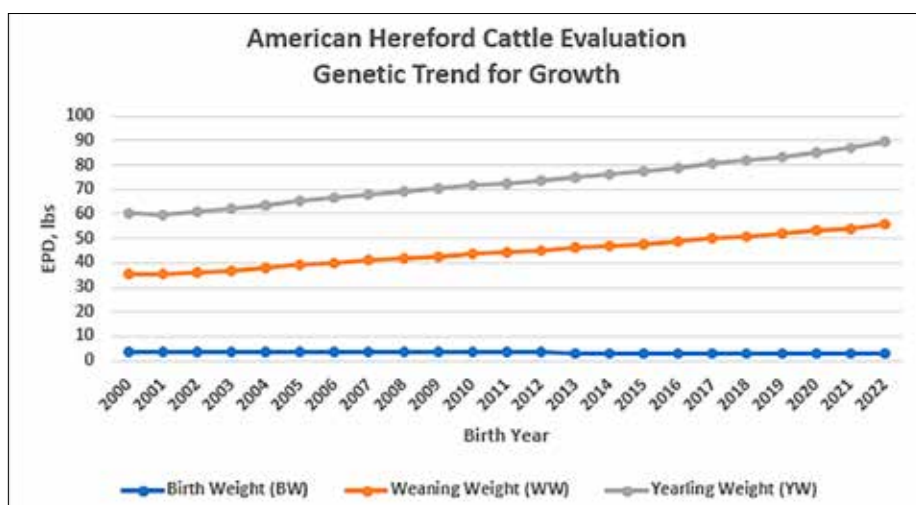
Three pillars to success

How did the generations before us succeed? When visiting with the leadership teams of multi-generational, family-owned-and-operated agricultural businesses, three key concepts became evident — collaboration, innovation and responsibility.

Collaboration: There is strength in numbers. There is also the need for awareness of what an operation does well versus where it needs to improve. Engaging in customer relationships to learn about a product's performance is key to keeping a customer's business. When the customer's business falters due to subpar product performance, the provider's company has a greater risk of failing too.

Innovation: The adoption curve of innovation creates multiple opportunities for a company to embrace a new technology. Success is most often found when the business adopts technology after evaluating how the tech will generate new revenue.

Responsibility: Responsibility means consistently holding the business, its employees and its principles accountable. Honestly evaluating how each of these variables are functioning are also key components.



Historical genetic improvement for growth traits. Genetic evaluations have evolved into modern citizen science. Where collaboration between individuals, community, academia, and companies result in powerful selection tools. Source: [Hereford.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/TRENDS-April23.pdf](https://www.hereford.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/TRENDS-April23.pdf)

Creating a seedstock operation for the future

These three concepts are also applicable to the success of seedstock operations. In terms of collaboration, breeders benefit more from collaboratively sharing data into the genetic evaluation than they would from keeping their data locked away. It's imperative to understand how the genetics being provided to customers are performing and how the genetics are positioning the customer to be successful. Furthermore, leveraging relationships and the subsequent genetic variation across the breed is becoming more sought after for effective supply-chain management.

Regarding innovation, breeders who educate themselves on cutting edge technology are more apt to profitably deploy it for long-term success. In terms of responsibility, the biggest responsibility of seedstock breeders is clearly defining their breeding objectives and knowing what market signals or consumer expectations economically justify

the breeding objective, and then routinely evaluating which animals and what combination of traits will allow the breeding program to exceed the objective. Cattle breeders are business operators; they're the leaders who are responsible for managing future investment strategy. The investment is the cattle, and the strategy is the mating.

Finding time to focus on these three concepts amidst the daily grind is difficult yet rewarding. The ability to actively incorporate collaboration, innovation and responsibility distinguishes the best breeders. Beyond having the determination to succeed, the best Hereford breeders build solid businesses and strong genetics capable of transitioning to the next generation.

It's always difficult to determine if children raised on the operation will return to the Hereford business or choose a new occupation outside agriculture. On the contrary, it's not nearly as difficult to identify Hereford genetics with the best

potential to perform and provide for the next generation of Hereford breeders. Registered Hereford cows are the most important assets to a Hereford business. The registered cow is the cash-creating asset, which implicates the financial health of the seedstock business.

As the seedstock business and the beef industry continue to evolve, what can Hereford breeders adopt to mitigate risk and secure a better future? If you had to go all in to provide a foundation for the next generation, what would you do? I'd use technology with a track record of predicting the future. **HW**

Editor's Note: Will Fiske is a technical services scientist for NEOGEN.



This logo indicates the animal was DNA tested. Hereford breeders who have invested in genomic technology to mitigate risk maximize their breeding objective.