

Designed Efficiency

Historic Hereford opportunity extended.



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

Rebuilding the nation's beef cow herd from the lowest level since 1961 has yet to begin. There were 3.47 million head fewer beef cows at the beginning of this year than the most recent peak in 2019. This deficit implies an extraordinary opportunity for commercial cow-calf producers to improve the herd.

The last time such opportunity existed, producers increased the average genetic potential for post-weaning growth. Along with technology and management, fewer cows continue to produce more beef tonnage.

Producers also increased carcass marbling in their herds, much of it through straight breeding. This led to giant strides in carcass quality and strong consumer beef demand. However, it came with lost maternal and direct heterosis, resulting in less cow fertility and stagnant or fewer pounds of calf per cow exposed.

Judging by conversations with producers this past year and growing Hereford demand expressed at sales across the country, more commercial producers are adding heterosis back to their herds by crossbreeding with Hereford genetics. Years of industry-wide research document the advantages of crossbreeding systems.

Hereford is the obvious and proven choice for crossbreeding. Along with heterosis, Hereford's genetic strengths include fertility, feed efficiency, docility and longevity. 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 is the hallmark of beef cow efficiency.

The American Hereford Association (AHA) commissioned the University of Tennessee to conduct a real-world economic analysis of breeding commercial Angus cows to a Hereford bull over time versus breeding

commercial Angus cows to an Angus bull. As you would expect, heterosis, especially maternal heterosis, drives significantly more net revenue per cow per year and more net worth, whether the herd size is 30 head or 500 head.

Across a decade, breeding commercial Angus cows to a Hereford bull yielded 21% more net revenue per cow per year (\$76 per head) for the 30-head herd and 24% more (\$90 per head) for the 500-head herd, compared to breeding commercial Angus cows to Angus bulls. You can find more details about the study in the research section of the AHA website and in the January issue of *Baldy Advantage*.

Hats off to the elite

Building cows that breed and produce a superior calf on time year after year demands proven genetics and management acumen.

AHA Dams of Distinction (DOD) are the epitome of maternal genetics and the dedicated efforts in building and proving them. Females earn recognition based on data submitted through the AHA Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™). These females emulate the original vision of the breed — build more pounds of quality beef and more production-efficient females with fewer resources than otherwise possible.

Females like these are always in demand — correct, sound feet and legs, with quality udders, added fleshing ability and an easy disposition, along with the objective traits of calving ease, optimal growth, optimal milk production, 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. The AHA's Sires of Distinction program, also highlighted in this issue, recognizes sires that have produced at least seven DODs. **HW**