

Proof Positive

Keep making gains without sacrificing essentials.



Shane Bedwell is the chief operating officer and director of breed improvement of the American Hereford Association. He can be reached at sbedwell@hereford.org.

Recently, I ate one of the best steaks I've ever had in my life. It was a Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) ribeye at a Hereford House restaurant in Kansas City, Mo. I can still recall the flavor and juiciness, as it was clearly well-marbled and embodied the bold, rich history of the Hereford breed. This dining experience gave me pause to reflect on the impressive National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) results from Olsen Ranches I shared last month. It also made me think about the CHB Sires of Distinction you will find in this issue (starting on Page 36). There are nearly 1,300 sires, which is 16% more than a year ago.

Clearly, Hereford breeders are moving the needle on carcass quality and raising the bar for end-product merit, but is it enough?

Your customers and those they serve provide the easiest answer. If they say yes, then you need to maintain carcass quality improvement and keep pushing the envelope to improve other end-product traits they are lacking. If the answer is no, then I suggest you consider keeping selection pressure on marbling. The competition isn't slowing down, and you can bet your bottom dollar the consumer's appetite for high-quality beef is here to stay.

Maintain genetic and phenotypic balance

Carcass traits are some of the most highly heritable traits. In laymen's terms, they are a sharp power saw, effective for a specific job when used properly. Without care they can create catastrophic damage.

In this case, gains in end-product merit cannot come at the expense of reproductive efficiency and maternal strengths. I often hear people say it's impossible to improve both at the same time. I disagree. The Olsen data serves as a prime example, as most of the sires

used excel in both the Baldy Maternal Profit Index (BMI) and the Certified Hereford Beef Profit Index (CHB\$).

I do agree that you can find examples in other breeds where growth and carcass traits were collectively pursued while disregarding maternal traits. Results of this single-focus selection are as negative as you would expect. Whenever you go at something with blinders on, tunnel vision prohibits attention to the broader view.

It makes no sense to produce genetics unable to maintain themselves and breed back without supplemental resources. Either you must feed more or accept more open cows. Neither is a good alternative.

Finding the threshold of optimum performance at the ranch level is crucial. Many Hereford breeders have established this optimum with balanced genetics capable of raising the bar ever higher. They deliver these genetics in a phenotypic package that includes structural soundness.

Further progress demands staying disciplined and unwilling to tolerate any exceptions to fertility, mothering ability or structural correctness.

Breeders, like those with bulls in the NRSP, prove what can be achieved. Their history also demonstrates that such balance is the result of steady progress over years, not the flip of some magical switch.

Head to Knoxville

Everyone is invited to the annual Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Research Symposium and Convention in Knoxville, Tenn. I look forward to seeing you there for what promises to be an outstanding program. Registration is still available at BeefImprovement.org/2024-symposium.

As always, keep them sound. **HW**