

Striped Cows; Solid Performance

Hereford-Brahman cross cows' hybrid vigor holds up in the deep South.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

It's hot. It's humid. It's wet. Just over 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, the swift sea breeze often falls short of Iowa, La., failing to cut the heat. The flat, coastal marshland shelters a few gators and countless bugs, making the soggy landscape seem better suited for rice and oil fields than for cattle. But, Brahman-Hereford cross cows rise to the occasion.

Tiger-stripe F1 females withstand the weather and the water, making them the ideal choice for Miller Farms' 200-head commercial cow-calf operation. Chris Miller, owner, has used half-blood Hereford-influenced females on his piece of southwestern Louisiana for more than two decades.

"They hold their weight," he says. "They thrive in our area because they can take the conditions."

Miller notes that, like anything worth having, you have to take care of your cow herd. He bolsters his F1s with



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ryegrass and good, fertilized hay. But the added efficiency and hardiness due to heterosis keep his inputs modest. The added hybrid vigor from the Hereford-Brahman cross adds a lot of "-ity" to Miller's commercial cow-calf operation, such as docility, fertility, longevity and marketability.

Docility

Perhaps one of the biggest pluses to adding some bald-faced genetics to eared cattle is the added docility. At one time, Miller had a herd of straightbred Brahman cows. While the cattle he raised in his small, hands-on

operation tended to be easy to handle, outside-bred eared replacements with less human contact often took years before they would gentle down. Herefords have long been known for their quiet nature, and Miller noted when he paired his Brahman cows with a Hereford bull that the resulting tiger-stripe calves were docile and easy to work.



“It’s nice to have cattle that you can handle and not get hurt,” he says. “We’re a small, hands-on operation run by a family, so the docility was a big deal for me.”

Today, Millers cow-calf operation consists entirely of Hereford-Brahman cross cows, which he says are hardy and easy to handle.

Fertility

Miller doesn’t run any straightbred English cattle; he’s found a little ear to be imperative in the deep South. His replacement female of choice is a Hereford-sired tiger-stripe out of a Brahman dam. These half-blood, Hereford-influenced dams’ dose of hybrid vigor adds fertility.

“They breed back, and they just take our climate, humidity and the water,” Miller says. “They’re the most normal cow for our part of the world.”

Miller Farms has a calving rate greater than 90%, and typically, the tiger-stripe dams calve within a 75- to 80-day window. To ensure that small calving window, Miller pulls the calves off their dams for a couple of days to trigger the cows to cycle as he turns in the bulls. Miller times this practice to be about three weeks after his calves are first worked, vaccinated and castrated to make sure no calves are too stressed during the process. As he notes, the calves find their moms within 20 minutes

Selecting a Hereford sire

Miller looks for a thick, long, moderate bull when searching for a Hereford that will cross well on Brahman cows to make the sought-after tiger-stripe daughters. He knows the value of a good Hereford bull, so much so that he collected his favorite bald-faced bull and has stored away sexed semen to make half-blood replacements in the future.

If you’re searching for a sire to create Hereford-Brahman cross calves, the American Hereford Association (AHA) has tools to help. The Brahman influence index (BIIS) is a maternally focused index designed for producers using Hereford bulls on eared, Brahman or Brahman-cross cows.

The index places significant weight on Sustained Cow Fertility, which predicts fertility and longevity in females. It also weighs Weaning Weight, Mature Cow Weight and Milk slightly positively to account for good growing calves in a low-input set of Hereford-influenced replacements. The index puts a negative emphasis on Dry Matter Intake, but a positive weight on Carcass Weight to increase anticipated profitability in fed cattle. Finally, Marbling and Ribeye Area are positively weighted so harvested progeny can successfully qualify for various commodity-based programs.

To search potential sires by their BIIS, visit Hereford.org and click on “EPD Search” from the black bar at the top of the desktop version of the site. Select the “Guest User” option on the next screen to access the MyHerd software. For a simple MyHerd Search for Hereford bulls with above average BIIS, check “Bull” in the search options on the left-hand column, before scrolling down to Indexes and typing the breed average for BIIS in the “Lower” parameter for the search. If you see a “Maximum results reached” message after searching, you may have to add a “Higher” parameter. Click Search and scroll through the list of potential sires, or continue to set potential parameters to narrow your sire search, such as Birth Weight, etc. **BA**

of being reunited in a small pasture that the pairs and sires will stay in for the next week to 10 days to help the bulls cover the large number of cycling cows.

“Around 50-75% get bred in the first 30 to 45 days, that’s typical,” Miller says. “We get a lot of calves on the ground.”

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Marketability

Miller Farms' tight calving window, thanks in part to the tiger-stripe dams' added fertility, helps produce a uniform, highly marketable set of calves. Miller refers to the Angus-sired offspring out of the F1 cows as quarter-bloods, and his quarter-bloods are in high demand.

Fellow cattlemen clamor over the opportunity to buy the heifers for replacements.

"All the heifers are bought by my neighbors. We buy good bulls, and we've got good cattle, so I have no problem getting rid of heifers for replacements," he says.

The uniform set of steer calves are marketed through Superior Livestock, and the truckloads normally head to buyers in the Midwest.

"The buyers typically like them. They tell us, when they go up to Kansas or wherever those calves go, there's very little sickness," Miller says. "They're a maintenance-free calf for them on their end. They're a real hearty and durable calf."

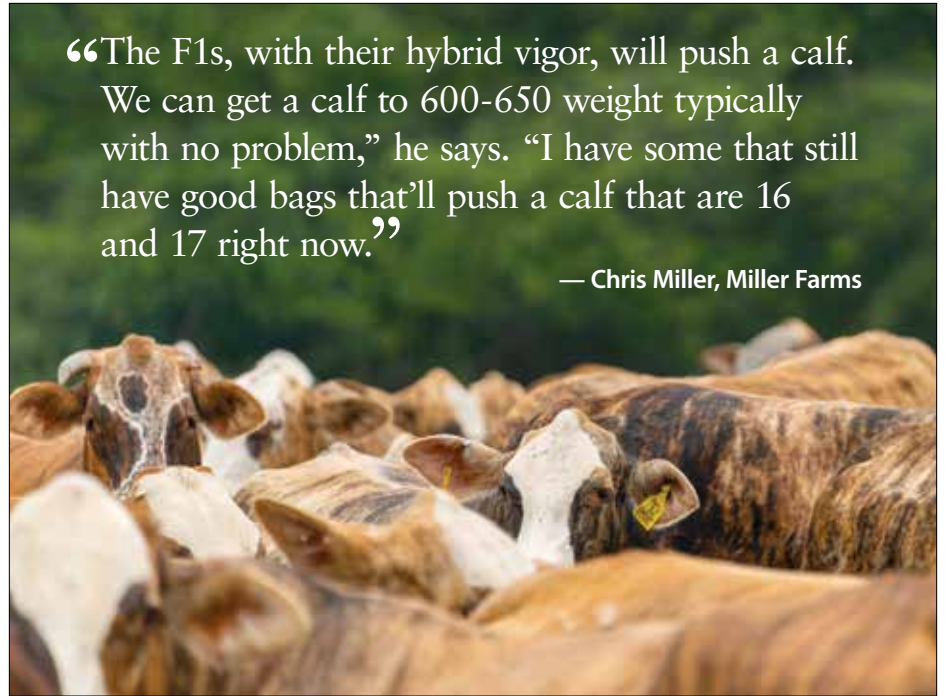
Longevity

The calves' added durability is another genetic advantage from their F1 mamas. Miller notes the hybrid vigor of these Hereford-Brahman cross females has them weaning good-sized calves for more than a decade.

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Typically, tiger-stripes last 12-15 years in Miller's cow herd, making his F1 cow herd's longevity just one more “-ity” that adds to the most important measure of a cow herd's success — profitability.

“They're tougher. They hold up. They have more longevity,” sums up Miller. **BA**

