

# Knowing Beats Hoping

Hereford Feedout Programs fuel genetic and management progress.

by *Wes Ishmael*

Reality is an uncompromising teacher. Yet, many lessons in the cattle business are lost because the distance between genetic decisions and the consumer's plate is long and winding.

"Ninety percent of the people involved in the beef business are cow-calf producers. They raise calves, maybe they wean them in the fall for 60 days or background them until spring. But very, very few of those producers ever follow them through the finishing phase," says Lee Mayo, general manager of HRC Feed Yards, LLC (HRC), Scott City, Kan. "If more of them did, I think it would improve the industry."

Improving their own genetics and management is the primary reason a growing number of breeders and producers participate in the American Hereford Association (AHA) Hereford Feedout Programs, which include



Jack Ward (left), AHA executive vice president, confers with field day participant Matthew Elzemeyer, Richmond, Ind.



Zeb Murphree, Hamilton, Texas, was among the NJHA members evaluating cattle at the Fed Steer Shootout.

the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Fed Steer Shootout. All cattle enrolled in Hereford feedouts are fed at HRC.

## Learning through experience

"We needed to find a way to make sure our genetics were doing what they're supposed to be doing. What better way to do that than to take calves that you're raising at home and send them to the feedlot," says Denise Loyning of L Bar W Cattle Co., Absarokee, Mont. "Let's get back carcass data. Let's find out if our health protocols at home are working. Are the bulls that we're selecting right for what the industry is needing today? Are those carcass bulls truly performing? Are all those things coming together?"

This is the third year L Bar W sent calves to the feedout. Data so far led them to shift some of the sires they utilize and health protocols they employ.

Likewise, Carlisle Braman, an NJHA member from Refugio, Texas, explains, "We're really just wanting to be able to better

ourselves." She and her sister, Madeline, are sixth generation ranchers. The sisters and her family saw their second set of calves at HRC during the annual field day April 12-13.

"It's benefited me as a breeder because I get to see from the bottom line what I can do better and then how my program can grow," Braman says. "Comparing spreadsheets from last year, we found there were more respiratory issues in our cattle. So, as breeders, we need to know what we can do better, even though I feel like this year it was more of a weather issue than anything else. But that's how we truly benefit as breeders — finding out what we can do to make our program better."

Moreover, Braman explains the feedout gives them an opportunity to experiment. This year the calves they sent included some Hereford-influenced Brahman tiger stripes.

"Living so far south, where it's so hot, black cattle don't do well in the heat of South Texas. It's really hard for them to stay on feed. We wanted



Garrett Parsons, (left) a nutritionist with Midwest PMS LLC, explains feedlot ration ingredients and their purpose to participants during the Fed Steer Shootout Field Day.

to see if a crossbred that can grow some hair, not a lot, but some hair, can withstand the winter up here and then be able to slick off its hair and stay on feed in the summer.”

The Hereford Feedout Programs 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. This year’s programs include 2,379 head of Hereford and Hereford-influenced steers and heifers from 103 participants in 20 states.

“Every person who raises a cow-calf needs to send one group of

calves so they can understand what they’re doing at home,” Loyning says. “I think that people will be surprised at what they can learn, whether it’s about the bulls they’re buying or their health protocols at home. You don’t know to change it if you don’t know something is wrong or what’s broken.”

#### Field day leverages education

Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs, believes feedout participants who also partake in the annual Hereford Feedout Field Day receive the most benefit, whether they’re new to feeding cattle or not.

“The collective experience and industry leadership represented

by presenters at each field day is truly amazing,” Befort says. “They are among the best in the industry at what they do. Whether it’s nutrition, animal health, cattle feeding or beef packing, they are leaders who graciously share their knowledge and art.”

Educational sessions presented by industry leaders included: cattle feeding basics, carcass value drivers, packer cattle procurement, feedlot rations and component identification, a hands-on necropsy demonstration and Beef Quality Assurance training.

“There’s no other event like this,” Mayo says. “How could you not be excited when we can bring all these people together and provide a collaborative education for the young people in the Hereford breed?”

Collaboration also underscores the importance of relationships for participants.

“It’s about relationships. You have to build these relationships,” Loyning says. “As the HRC veterinarian told us, ‘Build relationships with your veterinarian, your nutritionist and HRC Feed Yards or whatever feedlot you’re using, because this business is all about relationships. At the end of the day, that’s what it’s about.’” **HW**

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Delivery dates: Dec. 14 – 17, 2024



**HEREFORD  
FEEDOUT PROGRAM**  
AHA



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CATTLE ARE FED AT  
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