Performance Matters

Climbing Higher

by **Shane Bedwell**

World Hereford Conference highlights the value of Hereford research.

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Being part of the World Hereford Conference, held in conjunction with the American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting and Educational Forum was an extraordinary experience. It will be remembered for decades, not only because of the incredible relationships fostered, but also for the remarkably high value and demand for Hereford genetics demonstrated domestically and internationally.

Unmistakable pride for the breed and belief in its success was evident throughout the event, in many of the country reports and during individual conversations with those attending pre- and post-tours.

Research ahead

Those attending the Educational Forum heard exciting results from ongoing collaborative AHA research projects, including the project with Colorado State University and AgNext documenting sire differences for traits related to environmental sustainability, as well the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's research comparing the lifetime differences between breeding Hereford bulls or Angus bulls to commercial Angus cows. You'll find more details beginning on Page 32, in this issue.

The AHA continues pressing forward with research surrounding two other topics with growing industry importance — bovine congestive heart failure (BCHF) and red meat yield.

BCHF in late-day feedlot cattle, and Hereford's value in reducing its risk, relative to many other breeds, continues to garner more industry attention. Briefly, BCHF in feedlot cattle toward the end of the finishing period is a growing problem. It is an untreatable, fatal condition involving pulmonary hypertension that culminates in right-heart failure. BCHF symptoms are similar to those of brisket disease — also known as high mountain disease — which typically affects cattle at altitudes above approximately 5,000 feet. When feedlot cattle in the late stage of production at moderate and low elevations began dying of right-heart failure, exhibiting similar symptoms, many thought brisket disease was somehow the cause. Since then, research has proven BCHF is a different condition.

Although the direct cause or causes remain unknown, cattle affected by BCHF experience heart remodeling like cattle affected by brisket disease. What is known is that heart scores of those succumbing to the malady are higher than those of healthy animals.

Hearts are scored after harvest using a scale of 1 (normal) to 5 (excessively abnormal). Scores of 4 and 5 indicate late-stage congestive heart failure.

You can read more in the October *Baldy Advantage* (see Feedlot Heart Failure, Page 26).

The AHA has collected more than 3,000 heart score phenotypes from Hereford and Hereford-influenced fed cattle. A minimal number of these have had heart scores of 4 or 5. However, it is imperative that we continue to collect these phenotypes over time.

The AHA has committed to continue collecting both heart score phenotypes and genotypes from cattle in the National Reference Sire Program herd at Olsen Ranches and from cattle enrolled in AHA Feedout Programs. The AHA is also committed to collaborating with others to capture this essential information. I invite anyone feeding out Hereford or Hereford-influenced calves or those of their customers to participate. I'm happy to coordinate phenotype

collection as these cattle near harvest. We need to double down on this effort and continue to leverage this breed strength.

Assessing red meat yield

The AHA Board recently approved research related to assessing red meat yield more accurately. The current USDA yield grade system was adopted in 1965. Today's cattle are markedly different in type than 60 years ago, so it is no secret that the system needs retooled.

Current, concerted industry effort includes research in beef packing plants, which evaluates technologies to assess carcass red meat yield more accurately. However, there is also a growing need to develop more accurate live-phenotype tools to better predict red meat yield. This is because ribeye area (REA) expected progeny differences (EPDs) explain less than 5% of the variation in red meat yield. Hereford breeders have made great strides in REA, which is evident by the high number of cattle unable to qualify for the Certified Hereford Beef® program because their ribeye size is larger than 16 square inches. Although I've never seen premiums paid for cattle with smaller ribeye areas, there is continued talk about consumers wanting smaller, thicker steaks at the restaurant level.

All of this made it very clear that the AHA needed to be involved in this research to better understand how an animal's many other muscle areas impact red meat yield and what part of the animal provides the most effective correlation with red meat yield. As you select new genetics for your herd, I don't believe it's too soon to consider the importance of total muscle thickness. That is if you are not already selecting for strong muscle conformation and shape rather than simply selecting on REA EPD.

I'm very proud of the AHA Board for their progressive thinking in these areas. This research will be foundational as we move forward in an industry that is rapidly changing.

As always keep them sound. Merry Christmas to you and your families. HW