

Stay Focused

by **Austin Snedden, AHA president**



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Leveraging Hereford demand growth depends on each of us.

Record-high prices at production sales across the nation this year underscore growing commercial demand for Hereford bulls, as well as the broad opportunity to expand market share. Commercial producers who have trended toward making their cow herds too straight-bred are looking for heterosis, and they are coming home to the breed that paid for most of the ranches in this country. There is no hide-color premium for calves that will make up for the fertility and cow longevity provided by Hereford and heterosis.

Without a doubt, this is an exciting time to be in the cattle business, but we must stay disciplined as a breed association and as individual seedstock suppliers. High prices and high demand can make it tempting to cut fewer bull calves or to keep a cow around to get a few more calves, even if she is phenotypically inferior or inferior in production. There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to grow numbers, but our long-term brand as an association and as individual breeders is dependent on quality. That starts with a judicious castrating knife and a thoughtful cow sort.

All of us as breeders, and the American Hereford Association (AHA), have built a valuable pool of real phenotypic data, along with genotyping tools, which validate Hereford's industry relevance and aid in selection. We have selection tools and data from AHA research to show the value of the Hereford-sired calf.

In other words, we have many compelling reasons someone should consider buying a Hereford bull, from our suite of genomic-backed expected progeny differences for traits of economic value from birth to harvest, to the

voluminous research documenting the breed's added fertility, longevity and pounds at weaning. Once we make the sale, though, it's problem-free cattle that bring customers back. None of the value documented by the AHA's genetic evaluation can be expressed without first having problem-free, real-life udders, feet and fertility.

Hereford is poised to continue gaining market share, but we must be cautious not to stub our toe in a rush to get there too quickly. Let's make more, let's grow numbers, but let's build them right — good honest cattle come from good honest people. I believe that is a Hereford breed strength. Our membership is filled with good, honest, hardworking folks who refuse to take shortcuts, which translates into raising cattle that are backed by good, honest data and production.

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As breeders, we constantly look at the current calf crop and consider the next one. We need to keep pushing to make the next generation better than the last, but we must also keep in mind that commercial customers are judging our brand based on the bulls we sold them in the last 3-10 years. Let's push for progress, but not forget to make them sound, functional and practical because that is how our customers will judge us and the breed. **HW**