



Herefords
Go Global



Exporting Advice

One man's foray into the export business proves connections are everything when it comes to selling genetics internationally.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



It started by chance, really. While working at a bull test station in Iowa, herdsman Pat Simmons had the opportunity to go to a cattle show in Brazil in 1978. He met some people, and it wasn't long before word spread, and so began a successful career in the international genetics business.

"I was working in Iowa on a polled Hereford ranch that also had a performance test station," Simmons explains. "Breeders from around the U.S. and Canada would send bulls there to test them and to be compared to bulls from different ranches."

The ranch was called Triple H, owned by Keith Hoelzen and family, in Burlington, Iowa, and Simmons was its herdsman. A buyer from Brazil purchased four bulls and invited Simmons and the

Hoelzens to Brazil's large annual cattle show in 1978. Simmons and Keith Hoelzen attended, and it was a turning point in Simmons' life and career.

"I was fitting a lot of cattle back then," Simmons says. "While I was in Brazil I met a family and fitted some cattle for them. They asked me to come back the next year to teach their herdsman how we fit cattle in the U.S."

Simmons' business was expanding quickly, mostly by word of mouth.

"In 1980, I was in Denver and a Uruguayan breeder bought a horned Hereford bull in the sale there," Simmons explains. "He had heard [about my previous experience in Brazil], and asked me if I was willing to help. I flew on a chartered plane with his bull and other cattle Harding and

Harding (American Livestock Insurance) were exporting. We flew to Buenos Aires and from there they trucked the cattle to Uruguay. I stayed and worked for that ranch for about eight months.”

The following year Simmons was hired for a similar job, but this time for the first polled Hereford breeder in Argentina.

“For the next 20 years in addition to exporting I was still fitting quite a few cattle, in Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina,” he says. “It’s evolved into more of an export company.”

That’s how Genetic Leaders International Inc., based out of Advance, N.C., was born. Starting with that original Brazilian customer, Simmons has spent the last four decades marketing cattle internationally, especially to South American countries. Genetic Leaders is an import/export company, which specializes in beef genetics but also ships all species of livestock and equipment anywhere in the world.

“There was no great plan,” Simmons admits.

“I recommend to go and to see what people are doing. I know it’s not easy to travel, but it’s important to see what they’re doing and how everybody can benefit.”

— Pat Simmons

He just took on one project after the other and ended up spending usually between six to eight months of each year in South America.

“That wasn’t hard,” he says, “I really enjoyed it and still do. The biggest challenge was the language; I didn’t speak any Spanish or Portuguese.”

Hereford interest

There was a surge in interest in Hereford genetics in South America especially when Genetic Leaders International was starting out, Simmons says.

“The first 15 to 20 years of the company we did more Hereford business than all the other breeds combined,” he says. “It just happened. Partly because I was fitting a lot of Hereford cattle then. But, at the time, people were making a type change for bigger cattle.”

He says, South Americans have done a good job of breeding cattle, but they often look to the U.S.

continued on page 74...



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAT SIMMONS

In Latin countries, the enthusiasm is high for both the exhibitors and the spectators. In 1980 Pat Simmons (far right) exhibited for the first time at the Palermo Show, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Norman Catto’s bull was slapped champion and he is literally jumping for joy.

for genetics, although their genetics would work here in the U.S. very well.

“They don’t have the feedlots down there that we do,” Simmons explains. “There are more all the time, but politics have a huge effect on things there. If [South American producers] start getting paid for the quality of beef they produce, I expect more and more feedlots. And then there’ll be more focus on quality. That’s where Hereford genetics will rise again, because there’s nothing better than the black baldie.”

Travel recommended

Simmons encourages U.S. Hereford breeders to travel to South America and to see the industry there for themselves.

“They need to travel and see what’s happening in those countries,” he says. “A lot of contacts are made at Denver, and it’s a great showcase for all of the U.S. beef industry.”

But for someone looking to export cattle genetics, he says it’s important to travel to the national shows in foreign countries.

“I recommend to go and to see what people are doing. I know it’s not easy to travel, but it’s important to see what they’re doing and how everybody can benefit. I always learn something every time I travel,” Simmons says.

It’s not easy

The biggest challenge for Hereford breeders looking to export genetics to South America is not necessarily the language barrier, Simmons says.

“Don’t worry about the language too much because a lot of people speak English there,” he says, “and I know from experience with a smile on your face you will figure it out eventually.”

By far, he says, the hardest part of the export business is the paperwork. That’s why his company and others like it can be so beneficial to breeders — they know how to handle all the administrative work.

“The paperwork is very daunting; I can say this from experience,” he says. “When it comes time to

export, the lack of knowledge can be detrimental. Because everybody is very busy, they often don’t follow up on opportunities because it can be so time consuming.”

Simmons adds, “I tell new customers, ‘It will be frustrating; it will be a slow process, but there are some great rewards and wonderful people to meet.’”

He cautions that doing business internationally is not all that different from domestic sales except there’s more political risk involved.

“I don’t ship anything without the money having arrived to the States, unless the seller and the buyer have made an agreement between themselves, with terms of so many days,” he says. “A person has to be careful. Most people are good for it, but there are risks with international trade. I tell my customers this: ‘It’s not that we don’t trust you, it’s that we don’t know what will happen tomorrow.’”

For example, in 2008 in Buenos Aires, farmers and ranchers organized what was essentially a strike against their government and blocked the roads so no grain or food could be transported. Another time, Simmons wasn’t able to export any genetics into Argentina because the government refused to grant the proper permits.

“Situations arise and something could happen to me or something could happen to the other person,” Simmons says, “It’s just better to do business that way.”

He adds, “Many of these people I do trust completely, and have been doing business with them for over 40 years, but we still have to have all the i’s dotted and t’s crossed on the paperwork, or something could happen and we couldn’t get paid.”

But it’s worth it

That said, Simmons points out that international business is often another good source of revenue for breeders.

“People have to get to know you and have a comfort level,” he says. “Really you just have to build a relationship with people and once you do, it will last forever.”

All in all, Simmons says that although his business evolved into what it is today — it wasn’t something he set out to accomplish — he still wouldn’t change a thing.

“It’s neat to see what [my customers’] cattle have done in other countries,” he says.

And there’s hardly ever a dull moment in the import/export business.

“One thing about it, if there are no problems, it’s because nothing’s happened.” **HW**



Pictured with the 1998 grand and reserve grand champion polled Hereford bulls at the Expointer Brasil show (l to r) are Joao Manuel, Hilton Jacques, Reynaldo Titoff, Joao Viera de Macedo and Pat Simmons.