



Charting Our Course

AHA staff opens the Hereford Genetic Summit with a look back and encouragement moving forward.



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— Craig Huffhines

Charting a course for the future was the purpose of the Hereford Genetic Summit, hosted at the Darr Agricultural Center in Springfield, Mo., Sept 4-5. American Hereford Association (AHA) Executive Vice President Craig Huffhines opened with an inspirational look at the history of the Hereford breed and reminded breeders of the dramatic changes made.

Between 1960 and 1990, frame scores increased two full frames, he explained, birth weights increased 9 lb., and weaning weight increased 61 lb. Feedlot gains increased 178 lb. with a .44 lb. feed to gain conversion advantage.

“My point here is this,” Huffhines said, “we respond to change, we respond to signals, we respond to economics, but the parameters really haven’t changed all that much. We still need to produce a product that consumers will enjoy and come back and be willing to pay for.”

He reminded attendees that breeders made a great deal of progress but might have gone a little too far in spots.

“We are constantly, as seedstock producers, honing in, trying to get better, trying to fine tune this machine. And we can,” he said. “The difference today is we have technology. We have technology that’s more reliable, that’s more predictable and that can eliminate more mistakes.”

“That’s one of the reasons we are here today. What move do we make? How do we make our cattle better? Because now, we’ve got the predictability to make those kind of decisions,” Huffhines added. “What we can do with data and what we can do with genomics is going to change what we can do with our cattle. It already is. And that’s what’s so exciting. We’ve come up with new traits, economic indexes, development of maternal production traits that are hard to measure.”

Then, Huffhines explained, breeders can take advantage of reproductive technologies like ET (embryo transfer) and in vitro fertilization with confidence of the progeny produced.

“We can augment that with DNA technology and get some real predictability,” Huffhines said. “We know what they’re

going to do. That’s exciting; that’s powerful.”

Following that call to action from Huffhines, Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement, welcomed attendees and commented on genetic trends in the Hereford breed.

Ward pointed out that the fastest-improving index has been the CHB (Certified Hereford Beef) Index, which is mostly related to growth and carcass end-product merit. There has also been a steady increase since 1990 in the Baldie Maternal Index (BMI), which is using Hereford bulls on British-based cows. It is heavily driven by calving ease and moderating yearling weight to keep mature cow size from growing too much. Scrotal circumference and fertility are also incorporated.

“We’ve worked very hard on Heifer Calving Rate and Sustained Cow Fertility, and those two traits are in the final stages of being run and should be a part of our individual trait EPD (expected progeny difference) lineup, in either spring of 2015 or summer of 2015,” Ward said.

“Also, this fall we will release a new trait, an Udder Quality EPD, incorporating udder suspension and teat size, which is in the finishing stages. In the commercial industry, there’s a perception of the Hereford female of 15 to 20 years ago that had big teats and a saggy udder, and that needs to go away.”

Ward pointed out that since he began working for AHA in 2003, there has been a 51% increase in artificial insemination (AI) use, and the number of calves born by ET has doubled. He thinks these factors have been responsible, at least in part, for such rapid improvement.

Ward presented some more data he collected from spring bull sales reported in the western and north-central regions of the U.S. He used only bulls that sold for \$15,000 or less in order to exclude those sold strictly for high-end seedstock purposes.

What he found was that buyers are willing to pay more for cattle with good data to back them up.

About 2,700 bulls were compared, and of those, if the bull ranked in the top 10% for calving ease, weaning weight, marbling and ribeye area EPDs, he brought, on average, \$1,000 more than those that were only in the top 80% for those traits.

There was an even greater value difference between bulls when GE-EPDs (genomic enhanced-EPDs) were provided for them. The bulls with GE-EPDs sold for, on average, \$7,475 per head compared to the overall bull average of \$5,325 per head. That’s more than a \$2,100 difference in sale price.

“So those of you who tell me it’s not important to look at EPDs and make genetic improvements



Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president, told Summit attendees Thursday evening, “We respond to change, we respond to signals, we respond to economics, but the parameters really haven’t changed all that much. We still need to produce a product that consumers will enjoy and come back and be willing to pay for.”

within your herd, I have some data that proves you wrong,” Ward said. “The commercial industry is interested in data.”

With that said, the AHA will soon be offering a reduced rate to get those GE-EPDs. Expected in October 2014, there will be a new low density (LD) GE-EPD test that gives the owner a profile, parentage, abnormalities and GE-EPDs for only \$55 for an animal.

Ward wrapped up by saying, “Congratulations. You’ve done a good job as Hereford breeders and have introduced the tools and technology to make the genetic change that we needed to make to get more demand in the commercial industry. But, it’s no time to sit down and relax; it’s going to be full-foot-down, pedal to the metal to continue to bring the genetics that the commercial industry demands.”

He pointed to the now iconic picture of a Hereford bull with a black cow and baldie calf. He said, “Eighty-percent of the commercial cow herd today is still black-hided. That’s a great opportunity for us to run that Hereford bull right

next to her and create demand for our genetics. The problem is, if there’s anything that goes wrong with that good-looking baldie calf from the pasture to the sale barn to the feedyard to the packing plant, they’re not going to blame that black cow; they are going to blame that Hereford bull. So, if we’re going to continue to make progress, again, use the tools.”

AHA staff purposely called this conference a genetic summit, instead of a type conference, as similar breed-direction meetings were called in the past.

“Because it is about genetics,” Ward explained. “We would never tell you not to be concerned about type — the right size, the right length, feet and testicle size, color, the things that phenotypically your customers want. You’ll cover that; you need to. But if we want to continue to have demand for our cattle in the commercial industry, it takes genetic proof.”

Visit the “Summit Proceedings” page at HerefordGeneticSummit.com to watch presentations, download slides and listen to audio interviews of speakers. **HW**



AHA Director of Breed Improvement Jack Ward congratulated Hereford breeders on doing a good job utilizing the tools and technology to make the genetic change needed increase demand in the commercial industry. But, he added, “It’s no time to sit down and relax; it’s going to be full-foot-down, pedal to the metal to continue to bring the genetics that the commercial industry demands.”

Grillin’ with CHB

During the Hereford Genetic Summit Friday morning about 35 men and women participated in the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) Culinary Class and Grill-Off.

Facilitating the class was Andrew Brooks, CHB LLC director of marketing, and Flavio Ribeiro, Brazilian meat scientist. To begin the class, Brooks and Ribeiro demonstrated how to properly lay charcoal into a pit and then be able to light it once without having to use charcoal lighter.

After the grills were lit, they discussed rubs, marinades, the best beef cuts for the grill, when and how to use an onion to properly clean your grill and then temperature.

To demonstrate how to properly test for temperature they used the 4x4 rule. If you can hold your hand 4 inches above the grate for only about 4 seconds then you’re around the 400 degrees and an optimal grilling temperature.

When the fires were ready, each group received two sirloin steaks and two bags of salad and then the grilling competition really heated up. To accompany their salads, each group was able to choose items from a community ingredient table. Options included pineapple, peaches, nuts, berries, marinades, rubs, various sauces and olive oils. Each group was challenged to garnish its salad, name and describe it and then finally serve it.

After fierce competition group one and group five tied for the best salads and were awarded a set of steak cutting knives. “It was a fun two-hour event with a lot of great recipe sharing and smoke-filled stories,” Brooks said. **HW**



The winning grill-off teams: group 5 (pictured above) and group 1 (pictured below).

