



Purina Animal Nutrition Center sources black baldie replacement females from Kaczmareks 4K Herefords in Salem, Mo.

Feeding Fieldwork

To learn what works for the commercial cattleman through nutrition research, the Purina Animal Nutrition Center utilizes a black baldie cow herd for its efficiency and productivity.

by *Julie White*

Learning how nutrition affects livestock, companion animals and wildlife is what the Purina Animal Nutrition Center works toward each day on its 1,200 acre farm.

For beef cattle, Chris Forcherio, Purina Animal Nutrition beef

research manager, says individuals at the research facility have chosen a black baldie base herd for their nutrition research.

In the rolling hills of eastern Missouri, the Purina farm near Gray Summit has 110 to 120 black baldie cows. “The cows are here

to produce calves, but their main function is research,” Forcherio says. “We treat them a little differently than what a commercial facility will or a purebred breeder will but they are here to eat feed — that’s their goal in life — to test the products we want to put out in the industry from mineral to liquid supplements to blocks to tubs.”

The Purina team also tests intake levels for the company’s products. “We don’t put those products out in the world to sell until we are confident they are going to perform the way we think they ought to perform,” he adds.

A cross that works

Forcherio says he uses this cross for several reasons, and one is history. “Up until the mid-80s, Purina had a ranch in northeastern Oklahoma where they conducted most of their cow-calf research, and baldie cows were a part of the program. The ranch had 19 research pastures that each were a quarter section in size. Hereford cows were bred to Angus bulls to produce the F1 baldie offspring.”

The replacements selected from the baldie heifers from those matings stayed at the ranch.

Remaining heifers and steers were used for growing cattle studies at the research farm in Gray Summit.

“We’ve kept that cross because we are a commercial herd,” Forcherio says. “If you think about the baldie, in my mind that’s probably one of the best commercial cows that I want here in the fescue belt. You get efficiency from the Hereford side and with Angus those just marry together to get hybrid vigor. It gets you a good moderate framed cow for the forages we have here.”

Today, their cows are mated to Charolais bulls, a cross they have been using for many years. The farm purchased bred heifers as replacements until 2014, because they didn’t have the facilities to take a weaning animal, grow it to breeding, calve it out and rebreed it. The heifers brought in were bred to calve at the same time as the facility’s cows, which is late February, March and early April.

“This year we have worked with Joe Kaczmarek nearby in Salem, Mo., who has purebred Herefords and are generating commercial F1s,” Forcherio explains. “We purchased our first set of baldie heifers from the



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Hereford Influence sale in 2014, and we hope to do so again in 2015. Our long-term goal is to work with Joe to select potential replacements at his facility after they have been weaned.”

Forcherio says it's to their advantage to take the heifer calves at weaning and to develop them according to their program. “That way we can tell the story to our ranchers here visiting that this is how we do it and this is what our objectives are,” he adds.

“We'll take those heifers and calve them out in the spring, and they'll stay separate from the cow herd until they wean their second calf and are bred with their third. Once they wean their second calf, they will then be placed with the other mature cows being used in our nutritional research programs. Prior to that, these girls are still growing. I don't want to put a young, developing female in with a bunch of mature cows because they need to be fed differently,” he says.

Purina is currently working with about a 70-75 day calving season, since clean up bulls are turned in 14 days after a timed AI. The bulls are in with the cows for 60 days.

“Our ultimate goal is to reduce our breeding season to 60-65 days that includes both the AI and clean-up periods,” Forcherio explains. “We are proud of our success rate this first year. Some years it is hard to get conception rates in the 90% range in the fescue belt, especially in a short, defined breeding season.”

Securing replacements

Forcherio says it's also important that the replacements they are purchasing are grown on fescue. “Environment plays a big role and working with someone that is raising cattle on fescue is important to us,” he says. “Joe is very similar to us. He's analytical, likes numbers, likes to see results and likes to think outside the box in how to make things better.”

Kaczmarek owns Kaczmareks 4K Herefords along with his

parents Bill and Roberta, and brother, Tony.

“My parents started the herd in 1971 when they bought their first Herefords,” Kaczmarek says.

“They liked docility and longevity. They've always been very much on the cutting edge of trying to breed something new, something different. My brother, who is a doctor, and I came back seven years ago and decided to get the herd going again. We've taken over the herd and have also started our own herds.”

Kaczmareks calve around 325 cows and 75 heifers a year. “These are not all Hereford cows,” he explains. “We've kept back certain F1s through the years and we've been building our recip herd for embryo transfers.”

Kaczmarek says his customers seek their black baldie females because of the many advantages the cross breeding provides.

“The black baldie will inherit many of the positive traits of Hereford cattle such as docility, longevity and fertility. The greatest result of the cross breeding of Hereford and Angus cattle is heterosis. Due to this process, the average breeder will be able to wean calves anywhere from 40-60 lb. heavier. Refer to Circle A Ranch Heterosis Research Project, Harris Ranch Heterosis Research Project, and/or Simplot Livestock Co. Research Project on the American Hereford Association website (Hereford.org/TheyWantitAll).”

Kaczmareks use Purina feed starting with creep feed while the calves are still on their mothers, and then they are switched to Precon®.

“We put them on a ration that Purina came up with for us – it's a 30% Accuration formulation with corn and other minerals,” he says. “We run those for about 45 days while they are weaning and then they are ready to go. We schedule them for market at the end of October or early November. We make it our standard to administer our heifers with three rounds of vaccinations prior to going to market.”



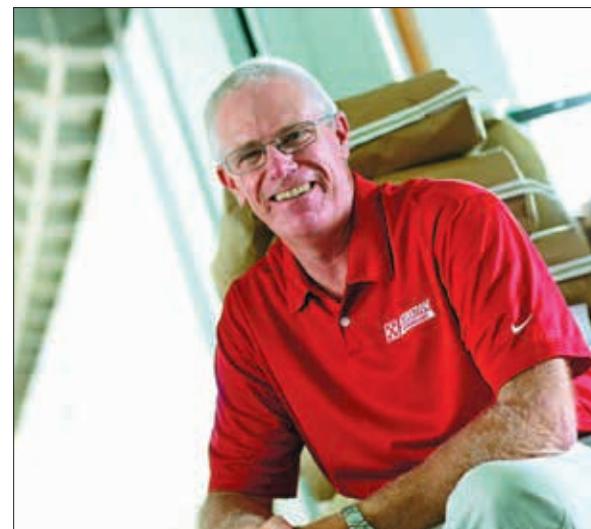
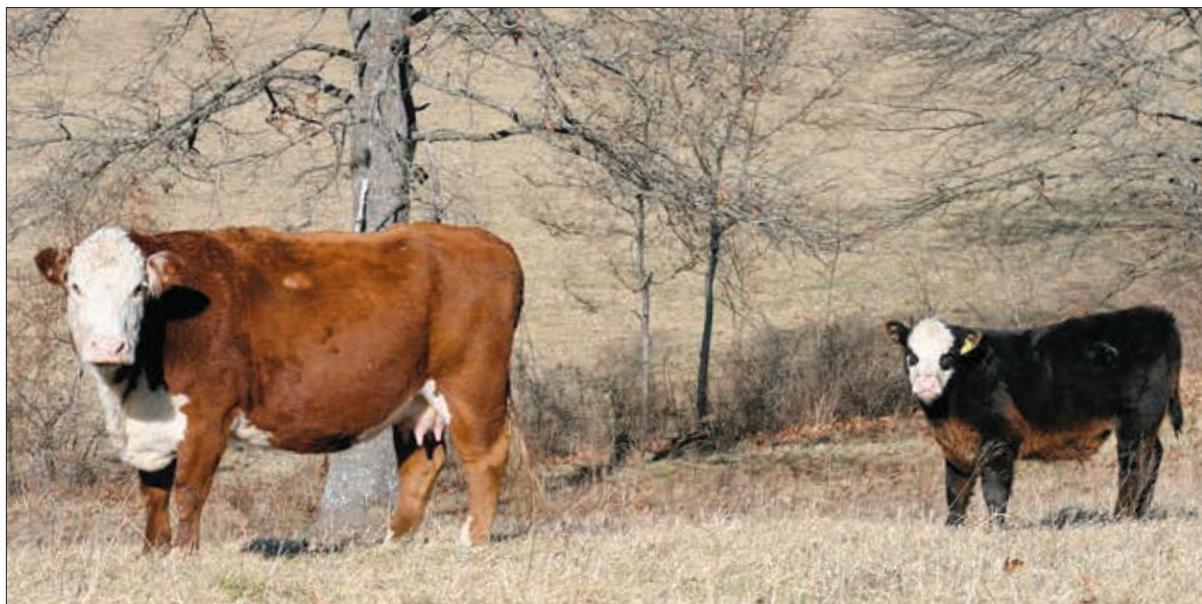
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— Chris Forcherio

“A cattleman who has purchased our heifers and bred them throughout the years has had great success at the Show-Me-Select Sale. These heifers topped the market on their particular day of sale. Many cattlemen begin calling in October asking when our F1s will be going to market. Our repeat customers know our reputation and can depend on our cattle enhancing their herd.”

“We have a lot of people who call us starting in October wanting to know when they're going to market so they can try to buy them. It's not just the cattle themselves – it's the total program – feeding and getting them ready.”

Forcherio concludes, “I've always thought the Hereford-Angus cross is one of the most efficient, productive females.” **HW**



Chris Forcherio, Ph.D., beef research manager at the Purina Animal Nutrition Center, says he prefers the black baldie females for their efficiency.