

FROM FIELD TO DESK . . .



by KURT GILMORE

Over the past several years, we have lost a significant number of our members (many of whom have been breed leaders) either to the commercial cattle business or to the pull of other breeds (mostly Red and Black Angus). Those who have left our ranks for the commercial business have said they find it just as lucrative or more lucrative than the registered business and without the hassle of all the paperwork. Those who have gone to another breed did so mostly because they thought it would be more exciting. Many of those who traded purebred cattle for commercial cows found the strain and effort of promotion and marketing more than they wanted to take on. Some people simply don't have a natural ability in this area and are more comfortable letting their local auction market do their selling for them. There is no doubt that the severe competition between breeds and between breeders today makes the "BULLS FOR SALE" sign on the corner fence line obsolete. The plight of these people I can understand.

More difficult to comprehend are those who have left our breed for another. Many reasons are cited, but more than anything else, it is doubtless the "hot market", "breed of the month" syndrome that has drawn many of our breeders away. Every breed has had its day in the sun and each, in its own time, has committed the same sin - the failure to castrate a high enough percentage of bull calves.

I truly believe that, as a breed, Polled and Horned Hereford cattle offer more quality pound for pound than ever before in their history and certainly more than their competitors. It has been severe competition from other breeds over the past two and a half decades that has allowed us to make such great strides in terms of quality. It has left Canadian Herefords with a predictable and nearly fault-free gene pool that is appreciated by those who purchase Hereford replacement stock.

Like you, I have heard the packers expound on the quality of the Angus carcass and their breeders deserve admiration from everyone in the beef industry for the success of their Certified Angus Beef program. I also know that Hereford beef has been meeting high quality standards for many, many years and I don't believe we have fallen off the track in the past 36 months.

Many people are looking at the black baldie cow like she is something new. She's been a good commercial cow since before I was born and half of her genes are Hereford.

We have faced competition before and always come out the stronger for it, but it is not something that just happens. Like many of you, I have spent a lifetime promoting Canadian Hereford cattle and I hate to lose even one breeder to our competition because it "might be more fun" for a year or two.

There is as much satisfaction for those raising and marketing Hereford cattle as there is for those in any other breed. However, the time has come for each and every one of us to step up to the plate and enthusiastically expound on the strengths of our breed to all who will listen. Talk about fertility. Talk about maintenance costs. Talk about predictability, performance and yes, you can even talk about carcass quality. Certainly for our customers, one of the great strengths of the Hereford breed is temperament - whether you are showing cattle in Ontario or calving cows in the mountains of British Columbia; everybody appreciates cattle they can handle with relative ease. Believe me - purebred and commercial cattlemen alike in other breeds are weary of getting run over by their own cattle.

We must attract new members if we are to survive and those newcomers will arrive if every existing CHA member works to provide the necessary incentives. Attend a steer show in your area this summer - show cattle at your local fair, help a neighbour process his calves at weaning time. It has always been the little things we do in our own communities that determine our success, but those things are much more important today.