

FROM FIELD TO DESK . . .

by KURT GILMORE



The perception of a thing - whether true or not - can be a very powerful influence. Perceptions can affect trends in the market place; totally unsubstantiated by facts or research.

A little while ago, I was in a large livestock market in southern Alberta sitting with a major order buyer and watching with interest as hundreds of yearling steers coming off grass were offered for sale. The great majority of these cattle weighed 850 to 1,050 pounds. For the most part, full rings of cattle selling were very high quality and most breeds were represented. The heavier (short-keep) British breed steers traded mostly from \$107/cwt to \$111/cwt while the lighter 850 weights sold \$116/cwt to \$121/cwt. Straight-bred continental breeds sold well off of these prices. I was pleased to note that straight-bred Hereford steers sold dime for dime and pound for pound with Hereford and black crossbreds and straight black steers. I commented to my order buyer friend how satisfied I was to see these good Hereford steers selling at such strong and competitive prices. He answered me by saying, "The yearlings are great - they will feed and grade with the best of them. However", he said, "fresh weaned Hereford calves will sell under pressure because if they go directly to a feedlot, they won't grade and yield with the blacks when they are finished." When I asked him if these differences in selling price were based on facts or perception, he readily answered, "Oh, perception for sure!" What was not said was that packer buyers, feedlot operators and order buyers will quickly use any perception, prejudice or general excuse to buy cattle cheaper. They will continue to do so not only until the error of the prejudice is proven, but until the perception changes and market pressure forces them to change their buying habits.

The idea that Hereford calves cannot compete with blacks when both are put on hot feed after weaning is having wide spread influence and economic impact. It is an idea that we must disprove with accurate and undeniable evidence to the contrary. Such research is currently underway on a large scale and results should be available this coming spring. In the meantime, don't give an inch when it comes to promoting Hereford cattle and Hereford beef! After all, right now we're only fighting an unfounded perception.

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FIELD REPRESENTATIVES

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Keith Miller

#101 - 8975 Mary Street
Chilliwack, B.C.
V2P 4J4

Phone: (604) 795-4363

Fax: (604) 795-4622

Email: kmiller@cwk.imag.net

ALBERTA

Kurt Gilmore

5160 Skyline Way N.E.
Calgary, Alta.
T2E 6V1

Phone: (403) 274-1734

Fax (403) 275-4999

Email: herfrd@telus.net

SASKATCHEWAN/MANITOBA /ONTARIO

Dennis Nevin

1715 - 9th Street
Brandon, Manitoba
R7A 6K3

Phone: (204) 726-4903

Fax: (204) 726-0494

Email: dennis@justiceforallcattle.com

Web site: www.justiceforallcattle.com

SOUTH WEST SASKATCHEWAN

Wade Bertram

Box 204
Piapot, Sask.

S0N 1Y0

(306) 558-4515