

SmartCross System Provides Economic Benefits
Maternal hybrid vigor improves profitability
By Clifford Mitchell

Decision-making is rewarded or blamed for most situations a business entity faces. Sometimes, due to factors out of their control, decision makers take the fall or are put on a pedestal for being in the right place at the right time. While there is a certain amount of success to be gained through proper timing of business decisions, many tools are available for use to justify a solution or take the emotions out of the process.

Through the improvement of tools available and increased awareness of things like Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs), ultrasound, record keeping and other data available to cattlemen, science, not tradition, has become the focus of sound management decisions. Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) data has increased awareness of maternal heterosis (hybrid vigor) in the cowherd and its effect on the bottom line. Several breed associations have tried to capitalize by creating hybrid versions of their product. However, the American Gelbvieh Association (AGA) is the only firm to trademark its Balancer hybrid, a chief component in the SmartCross crossbreeding system.

“The 50% Continental-50% British cross gives producers the maximum level of maternal heterosis. With this cross, producers will capture all maternal effects,” says Scott Greiner, Extension Beef Specialist, Virginia Tech University.

With so many tools to help identify strengths and weaknesses in a breeding program, sometimes it is hard to identify what traits mean the most to the bottom line. More pounds or performance on the rail are cut and dried as to the dollars added to a producer’s pocket. Other traits that impact the earning potential of each female are hard and sometimes expensive to track.

“When you study the data, maternal heterosis produced through crossbreeding is the best genetic tool we have to improve reproductive efficiency in the cow herd,” Greiner says. “From an economic standpoint reproductive traits are the most important. Unfortunately, we don’t have a lot of tools to help make progress, like we do with growth and carcass.”

Through research and seedstock producer’s constant effort to satisfy their customers, new visions from a hybrid standpoint are being offered to help improve the desired traits within a cowherd.

“We don’t necessarily need all cows to be 50-50. The 50-50 cross maximizes maternal heterosis and producers have to find the optimum,” Greiner says. “Maintaining some level of maternal heterosis will improve a lot of traits.”

Matching cattle to the environment and available resources is often the best tool to determine which individuals consistently get the job done. Genetics that get the most out of what is available often translate into profit. The SmartCross crossbreeding system allows cattlemen to design and select specific combinations that best fit the production scenario.

“Keep records and identify the genetics that fit the environment, management and feed resources. Whether they are halfbloods, seven-eighths, three-eighths or five-eighths cattle, there is an optimum level of maternal heterosis for every producer,” Greiner says. “Producers need to match the genetics and inputs in the system to the goals they are trying to accomplish.”

Since the use of hybrid in commercial herds is relatively new to the beef business, education becomes first and foremost through the SmartCross system. Hybrids are not the latest fad, but a useful tool to enhance production. Just like all the other tools available to help producers generate the most profit, using a hybrid will not automatically garner increased premiums.

“It is a combination of genetics and production goals to maintain a profit. Producers need to be aware of cost of production, the level of milk production and mature size to maintain their advantage,” Greiner says. “Without proper management, a producer can get into trouble just as fast with a hybrid as a straightbred animal, no matter what breeds he is using in the cow herd.”