



Centered on Consistency

Kentucky Hereford breeder Danny Miller provides consistency to his commercial customers.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

Amidst the rolling green hills of south central Kentucky lies a cattle operation striving for a beauty of its own — consistent, linebred, quality Hereford-based genetics.

JMS Polled Herefords, owned by Jack and Danny Miller, Knifley, Ky., has placed a focus on building a straightbred herd of R.W. Jones' JR Victor Domino-bred cattle since 1975. The goal, Miller says, is consistency.

And according to John Meents, American Hereford Association fieldman, the Millers are excelling at their goal.

"He has the most uniform herd of cows that I have ever seen, of any breed," Meents says. "His cows have maybe the best set of udders I have ever seen in a Hereford herd. The cattle are not very big; however, if you talk percent body weight weaned per cow exposed, the program could be a champion."



Danny and Jack Miller, Knifley, Ky., have focused on developing a consistent, linebred Victor Domino herd since 1975.

Miller believes an intensive, linebred breeding program has led to this consistency. A consistency that keeps customers coming back time and again.

Victor Domino from the start

In 1972 JMS Polled Herefords — named for Jack Miller and Son — was formed after Jack retired from the Air Force.

"We were living in Arizona in the 1970s, and I said I wanted to come back and raise whitefaced cattle at home," he says. "Dad let me do everything with the cattle, and he focused on the farming and the hay."

For nearly as long, Miller has worked for Fruit of the Loom — most recently as the director of process engineering of textiles.

"I oversee the bleaching and dying processes for the fabric we make into t-shirts, underwear and sweatshirts," he says. His wife, Janelle, works for the local school system.

Two of Miller's three sons — Trent and Tyler — are involved in the operation today. His nephew, Matthew Netherland, also assists with the operation.

When Jack purchased his family's home place in Kentucky, he began the research on the Hereford genetics to begin his herd.

"My grandparents had old editions of the *Livestock Breeder Journal*, and my dad and I became interested in the Victor Domino line, based on ads from breeders such as R.W. Jones," he says. "That's how we got interested in this line of cattle."

The Millers established their herd with R.W. Jones' Victor Domino genetics and began crossing the different Victor Domino sire lines to preserve

the genetic base and maintain consistency throughout the trends of the industry, Miller says.

"The Jones cattle had more gold sires than any other firm at the time," he says. "In the '80s and '90s, we heard of the great frame race and polled Herefords began doing different things," Miller says. "People went in that direction and abandoned certain lines, but I never did that. We just kept our herd pure."

The Millers now utilize five sire lines in their linebreeding program, which includes a heifer base that has been closed to outside females since 1987.

They typically turn out about eight bulls a year with their herd of 150-160 females, with calving done strictly in the fall.

"We are an all-natural breeding operation with no AI (artificial insemination) and no drugs," he says. "Basically, this is due to the time constraints of me working a full-time job. It helps with time management. The cow herd is multi-trait selected, with great emphasis placed on calving ease and udder quality. We are able to select and predict how our cattle will look and perform, not only for calving ease, but for fleshing and milking ability, as well."

And linebreeding also helps create and preserve other valuable traits, Miller says.

Preserving the positives

Among the many benefits of their system, Miller says, are the assets provided to their commercial customers.

"The purer the line, the greater the heterosis when crossed," he says. "In addition, they are naturally slick haired, making them ideal for hot, humid climates, while being able to acclimate to any region in the country."

This adaptability rings true with their customer base, which now spans 31 states and as far as Argentina.

Miller says his customers appreciate his genetics for the maternal traits they bring to the herd.

"When folks are breeding certain lines that don't milk well,

"We work closely with our commercial customers, and they know what's important to them. I've geared my energy toward those commercial customers."

— *Danny Miller*

they use our cattle to correct that, as they're a highly maternal line," he says. "These cattle can be used as a tool in the breed, and we offer some things that some folks don't, from a commercial standpoint."

Miller says 90% of their bull buyers are within a five-county area.

"We work closely with our commercial customers, and they know what's important to them," he says. "I've geared my energy toward those commercial customers."

Miller's genetics also appeal to purebred breeders. Rick Steinbeck runs about 100 Hereford momma cows and another 70 Red Angus cows on his Steinbeck Farms, Hermann, Mo. He has purchased Hereford bulls and females from the Millers since 1993.

He says he first turned to the Millers because he sought consistent, slick-haired Herefords to work well on his fescue pastures.

"Before we worked with the Millers, some of our cows worked out, and some didn't. We did a lot of culling," he says. "We were looking to sire consistency in our females."

Today, 90% of the females in his herd trace back to three of Miller's Victor Domino bulls.

Although Miller focuses on bulls, his females are nothing to ignore, Steinbeck says.

"His females are exceptional," Steinbeck says. "They have always impressed me more than anything. He probably has more consistency with udder quality than any other program I've seen."

In addition, Steinbeck says, the hardiness of Miller's herd is an advantage.

"None of his cattle are pampered," he says. "What you buy, you bring back home. It's not like you are driving a new car off the lot."

Miller says this consistency and predictability were the goals from the beginning, when he and his dad were first getting into the business. They are what led them to Herefords.

Why Herefords?

Miller says he and his dad discussed their desire for Herefords long before their dream became reality.

"They are hardy and adapt well," he says. "And, they are a maternal breed with impressive calving ease. We breed for moderate-framed animals and have an opportunity with our Hereford sires on black cows. We get good heterosis, maintaining calving ease."

And this heterosis, among other things, continues to be the goal of Miller's operation.

Always aiming high

Miller says his goal isn't to breed a great one but, rather, to breed many good ones.

"The main goal of my operation is to make the cattle more consistent," he says. "We are finding consistency here, as our herd progresses. When customers go into a pen of bulls here, they're searching for the best one, but most all of them would breed similarly."

He believes using the same bloodlines can increase the consistency of a herd.

"We're doing something a little different here, with the linebred cattle," he says. "Uniformity and consistency go hand in hand to produce a product that is reliable."

This consistency is a benefit to his customers, he says.

"We can create predictability — knowing the type and mature size



The Millers take pride in their Victor Domino-based sire line, including herdsire JMS Victor 343 745.

our customers can expect," Miller says. "There's no surprise."

And this certainty is something he hopes to continue for generations to come.

"The herd has been going for 37 years, and I believe the cattle are getting more consistent every year," he says. "I hope we can continue to improve and continue to satisfy our bull customers."

Based on past trends and customer success, it's likely the Millers will do exactly that: provide consistency and quality for their customers for years to come. **HW**



The Miller family places emphasis on maternal traits such as udder quality and calving ease in his cow herd, which has been closed to outside females since 1987.