

## The Importance of Crossbred Cows

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The production of crossbred calves yields advantages in both heterosis and the blending of desirable traits from two or more breeds. However, the largest economic benefit of crossbreeding to commercial producers comes from having crossbred cows for multiple reasons.

Maternal heterosis improves calf survivability to weaning and increases calf weaning weight. Crossbred cows exhibit improvements in calving rate of nearly 4 percent and an increase in longevity of more than one year due to heterosis. Heterosis results in increases in lifetime productivity of approximately one calf and 600 pounds of calf weaning weight over the lifetime of the cow. Crossbreeding can have positive effects on a ranch's bottom line by not only increasing the quality and gross pay weight of calves produced but also by increasing the durability and productivity of the cow factory.

Traits of most economic value to commercial, self-replacing herds are reproductive traits including age at first calving, reproductive success and replacement rate. These maternal traits are sex-limited, lowly heritable and some are expressed quite late in life. This has precluded replacement heifer selection on these traits, and frustrated genetic progress. In fact, the antagonism between terminal and some maternal and calving traits may have led to negative progress, as positive selection on the terminal traits can result in negative selection on the maternal traits. It has been suggested that U.S. cow-calf producers should have a relative economic emphasis of 47 percent on reproduction, 24 percent on growth, and 30 percent on carcass traits.

So with all these advantages, why doesn't every cattleman practice crossbreeding to capture the added value of heterosis?

Dr. Matt Spangler, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Brian McCulloh, Woodhill Angus in Wisconsin; and Dale Green, Castalia, Iowa seedstock producer, will have a panel discussion on this topic at the upcoming Driftless Region Beef conference Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, 2013, in Dubuque, Iowa.

The conference will begin at 1 p.m. on Jan. 31 and run till 11:45 a.m. on Feb. 1. Thursday's afternoon program will focus on feed efficiency at all stages of production, with an evening discussion focused on straight versus crossbreeding. Friday morning's program includes three breakout sessions for feedlot operations and three for cow herds.

Registration for the conference is \$80 before Jan. 15 or \$100 after Jan. 15. Additional information about the conference is available at [www.aep.iastate.edu/beef](http://www.aep.iastate.edu/beef) .

The Driftless Region Beef Conference is sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, the University of Minnesota Extension, and University of Wisconsin Extension. The planning team strives to deliver the latest in research-based information regarding the beef cattle industry. For more information or to receive a brochure, contact Denise Schwab at 319-721-9624.