

The Goldrush Genetics Program – AI, DNA Testing and More

When Mike Hynek was a college student working on his graduate program thesis, he came across information from the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center, Clay Center, Neb., about a breed that excelled in maternal traits and was No. 1 among all breeds for pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed. That breed was Gelbvieh.

“The information about Gelbvieh was so impressive that I found it difficult to believe. But the information was there in black and white—and the information was objective information. It was not opinion; it was based on hard data,” Mike states.

“Although I grew up on a family farm with a commercial cow/calf herd, I knew that one day I wanted to raise seedstock and knew that Gelbvieh would be my breed of choice.”

In 1981, Mike entered the Gelbvieh business. His initial introduction was artificially inseminating a group of high-quality commercial cows to fullblood Gelbvieh bulls.

“Then I quickly realized just how slow a process breeding up would be,” he elaborates. “It would take years for me to have a purebred Gelbvieh herd. So rather than breeding up from scratch, I began to look for some purebred Gelbvieh females to buy.”

When the opportunity arose to purchase offspring of the first purebred Gelbvieh female in the United States, Mike jumped on it. He also took advantage of other opportunities and purchased numerous other purebred Gelbvieh females in private treaty dispersals from a couple of key Gelbvieh pioneer breeders.

While many other Gelbvieh breeders were putting AI to the side and going the natural service route, Mike recognized the power of staying with AI. Thus, he went the more labor-intensive work route that would give him increased sire power and made AI front and center of his program.

“My entire program has been based on selecting the best AI sires for my herd,” Mike tells. “Today the herd is generation after generation almost all the result of AI.”

“My focus was then, and continues to be, lowering birth weight while increasing weaning weights using whatever data is available to me. Plus, the goal is to have each animal produce progeny better than himself or herself.”

More Breeds

When Goldrush Genetics bull customers who loved crossbreeding and its hybrid vigor began having too much Gelbvieh in their cows, Mike suggested they use Angus bulls. Granted, the suggestion cost him a loss in their bull sales, but he wanted what was best for his customers.

“I hated to urge my bull buyers to switch to using Angus bulls, but it is what they needed to hear,” he states. “Crossbreeding’s hybrid vigor is a free lunch, so why not take advantage of it.”

Rather than continue to watch bull buyers go another direction for their bulls of another breed, Mike opted to add a second breed to his program: Angus. This move also allowed Mike to develop a carcass herd of Angus that would compliment his Gelbvieh genetics through AI.

In 1995, a third breed, Red Angus, was added to the Guide Rock, Neb., program.

“Our Angus herds were built 100 percent out of AI,” he explains. “We have tried to use the best carcass sires we could find, using high-marbling bulls.”

DNA Testing

Goldrush Genetics is one of a handful of Gelbvieh breeders who have really delved into DNA testing.

Mike’s introduction to DNA testing was through the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center—the same group that introduced him to Gelbvieh. He was organizing Gelbvieh tours in Nebraska and one stop was the U.S. MARC where researchers were talking about shear force and identifying genes that affected tenderness.

“They thought it was something significant, so I started paying attention to it,” he states.

Mike learned more about DNA testing while talking in the mid 1990s with cattlemen from South America at the National Western Stock Show. These informed cattlemen told Mike that U.S. cattlemen needed to start DNA testing or they would be left behind.

Mike took their information to heart. He returned home and soon began DNA testing his entire herd for the homozygous black gene. This wasn't an inexpensive move, as DNA testing was \$100 per animal at the time.

"Many of our customers were seeking black Gelbvieh, and we wanted to be able to tell our customers if an animal was homozygous or heterozygous for black coat color," Mike states.

Mike also made the decision to include DNA at impact mating decisions, DNA results were added to the mix."

When DNA testing expanded to include identifying animals for the tenderness and marbling gene, Mike was right there ready again. In 2004, he DNA tested his herd sires for the tenderness gene and marbling gene. And he discovered that he had one of only four Gelbvieh bulls in the breed that was homozygous for the marbling gene.

A year later, in 2005, Mike DNA tested his donor cows and a few of his best calf prospects. In 2006, the entire calf crop and everything in his 2006 production sale were DNA tested.

"Sure it costs to DNA test animals but it's a service for our customers," Mike relates. "Plus DNA testing lets me design genetics that my customers want." He adds that the Angus bulls Goldrush Genetics uses have to have all of the tenderness genes or he doesn't use them.

"Buying a bull without knowing the DNA is like buying a truck without knowing what kind of engine it has," Mike states.