



by R.L. "Bob" Hough, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President
North American Limousin Foundation

Limi Up Your Bottom Line

The data is in, the proof is indisputable, crossbreeding works and nothing works better than Limousin and Lim-Flex[®] on high-percentage British-based cowherds. Limousin adds the extra muscle, cow longevity and moderate cow size that is expected of the breed. Plus you get the extra 25 to 30 percent in lifetime production gained from heterosis in a planned crossbreeding system. Any serious, profit-driven, commercial cattle producer simply cannot ignore the power of heterosis.

Why did our industry move away from crossbreeding? One reason was the force of Angus and their powerful backing of Angus-branded product lines. Angus thought it could become the "Holstein" of the beef industry. Instead its role has become the maternal common denominator, in most environments, for a crossbreeding system. The branded products had such a pull-through effect that one breed started to dominate the market. Few people realize that to qualify for Angus-branded product lines, the animal must only be 51 percent black hided and can be either horned or polled. Over 80 percent of Limousin qualify for these Angus product lines. One breed executive I know keeps an ad on his wall for Angus dog food, clearly showing that Angus-branded beef specifications are not a reason to not utilize the benefits of Limousin heterosis and genetics.

Good times are surely ahead of us. Combined with crossbreeding efficiency, we are experiencing a tight supply of cattle, which means high feeder and fed cattle prices will continue. It is truly a bullish time in the beef industry, and a time to invest in good genetics.

Limousin cattle offer moderate milk and moderate mature cow size to fit into most any environment. People often don't realize the cost of excessive milk. Not only is rebreeding slower, but high-milking cattle have more visceral and organ mass, which cause them to have higher maintenance requirements year-round. In this time of low-cost production, profit-minded cattle producers are starting to look at very high-milking cattle and breeds that are known for high milk, as something they just cannot afford.

Any good commercial beef producer must look at their breeding programs and strongly consider buying Limousin

and Lim-Flex bulls from the perspective of the product they will have to sell along with feeder cattle and the heifers they will retain. Most of the market is mainstream; 60 percent Choice and Yield Grade 2. Based on last year's video auctions, quarterbloods were the top-selling cattle, probably aiming for over 60 percent Choice, with halfbloods perfectly acceptable. Three-quarter-bloods were more "Laura's Lean" type of cattle, and it was necessary to keep them natural. Without some type of preconditioning you can expect a discount, source and age verification always seem to bring premiums, and keeping cattle natural is a bonus no matter what the percentage.

On the female side, 50 percent is without a doubt where you are going to gain the most heterosis. The progeny probably have the most flexibility to either enter "Laura's Lean" or the mainstream market depending on how they are managed. The nice thing about 50 percent cattle is the ease of management. First, you can use either a purebred Limousin or 75 percent Lim-Flex bull on British-based cows, and then go into a straight breeding program with 50 percent Lim-Flex.

If you are a purebred Limousin breeder or a commercial producer, I challenge you to think outside the box. Be proactive and make breeding decisions that demand a higher premium. Go for that low birth weight, high growth and marbling bull that will bring dividends to you and the entire supply chain. Meet the demands of your customer no matter if it is a commercial producer or a feeder. Consider breeding for Lim-Flex cattle or use a Lim-Flex bull.

We are making some fantastic 50 percent Lim-Flex; perfect for the commercial industry. Breed Lim-Flex to Lim-Flex and keep the percentage at or around 50 percent. Fifty percent Lim-Flex cattle can fit the mainstream market or enter almost any niche market.

I am so excited about the Limousin breed right now. We have taken care of our docility problems, and all the cards in the beef industry seem to be lining up in favor of Limousin and Lim-Flex. Limousin are in the right place at the right time with the right traits as crossbreeding takes hold of our industry again.

LW