

A Nod to New England

Mountains and lakes aren't the only gorgeous scenery in the New England region. Hereford herds and their unique opportunities are beautiful, too.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

Mountains and lakes, dotted with lively, engaging, bustling cities — when Americans think of the New England region, these are often the first images to come to mind.

Although that vision is accurate, one piece is often missing from that view: Hereford



breeders who have found their niches. Their operation sizes are often smaller, and their markets and potential take a different look from their counterparts throughout the country. But one

thing is certain: New England Hereford breeders are making their mark.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOP OF THE HILL FARM

Alan Fredrickson
TOP OF THE HILL FARM
Wolfeboro, N.H.

Alan Fredrickson grew up in Massachusetts, south of Boston, and was introduced to the Hereford breed in high school. About 14 years ago, he and his wife, Carolyn, purchased 108 acres overlooking Lake Winnepesaukee and began leasing about 100 acres for hay near the mountains of central New Hampshire.

“The area where we lived, south of Boston, was mostly developed and there wasn’t much land left,” he says. “We decided we wanted to expand and made the move. Our farm may not seem large in some areas of the country, but we don’t have the land base that is available in other areas. Our farm is somewhat large for this part of the country.”

The Fredricksons have two children: Anna, 21, now a junior at the University of New Hampshire, and Erik, 23, who will graduate from Oklahoma State University next year with a degree in animal science and agricultural business.

Both children were raised showing Hereford cattle through the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA).

Today, the Fredricksons manage about 80 head of Hereford cattle — 35 of which are brood cows calving in the spring and fall.

They market show cattle to families in their area each year. One of the biggest sources of income for the farm is a direct retail beef market.

“We have a small store at the farm and market about 30 feeder steers each year through our direct sales of individual cuts of beef,” Fredrickson says. “We attend farmers’ markets in the summer and winter, and we also market beef through a small retail store at the farm.”

Their repeat customers have continued to grow in the past three to four years.

“People really seem to want to know where their food comes from and how it’s being produced,” Fredrickson says. “We have beautiful views of lakes and mountains, and people love to come out and see the place, too.”

When Anna and Erik were youth showmen, the Fredricksons exhibited at Junior National Hereford Expos (JNHEs) and other state and regional shows on the East Coast.

Dan Fitzpatrick
OLD BEECH FARM
West Granby, Conn.

Dan Fitzpatrick and his wife, Sally, began raising Herefords in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains in the late 1980s as a family project for their daughters, who showed at JNHEs and other shows across the country.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOP OF THE HILL FARM

The Fredrickson family owns and operates Top of the Hill Farm where they have 80 head of Hereford cattle.

“Sally grew up showing cattle in New Hampshire and had the background and knowledge, and it was something I had always aspired to do,” Fitzpatrick says. “I learned as time moved along.”

The Fitzpatricks’ daughters are now grown. Meg is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and works in the Pentagon. Their younger daughter, Mairén, is majoring in animal science at Penn State University.

Today, the family manages 30 head of Hereford cattle, marketing registered Hereford bulls for breeding and females for replacements.

“We have assistance from very good friends in the cattle business who help us market our cattle,” Fitzpatrick says. “We’ve been able to market our cattle in Pennsylvania, Virginia and New Jersey — and all states in New England.”

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PHOTO COURTESY OF OLD BEECH FARM

Dan and Sally Fitzpatrick have been raising Herefords in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains since the late 1980s.

The Fitzpatrick family remains active in the show scene, exhibiting at the Keystone International Livestock Exposition, the North American International Livestock Exposition and the National Western Stock Show.

Herb Holden Jr.
DOUBLE H ACRES
Broad Brook, Conn.

Double H Acres began in 1977 as a commercial cattle operation and hobby farm for Herb and Kathy Holden, with the family's primary income coming from their sand and gravel business, Herb Holden Jr. says. He was born in 1980 and his sister, Ashley, arrived in 1983.

By 1988 the family purchased its first registered Hereford heifer from Maple Rock Farms in Pittsburg, Vt.

"Basically, it was my dream as an 8-year-old to raise registered Hereford cattle," Holden says. "I was very much in awe of the big, beautiful Hereford operations in our area in the late '80s and early '90s."

By 1995 the Holdens had grown their herd to 50 registered Herefords. Holden and Ashley

became active in the NJHA, and Ashley went on to become runner-up in the National Hereford Queen contest in 2003.

Holden ventured to Kansas State University in 1998 and earned his degree in agricultural economics and meat science. In 2006 he returned to the family sand and gravel business, where he now serves as general manager. At that time, the Holdens entered the Hereford show scene again.

"I learned quickly, if you're going to be showing, you need to learn how to make money doing it," Holden says. "The show thing had become a second job, and it was costly. I said, 'I have a degree in ag econ and meat science — I should start focusing on the meat business.' Instead of selling live cattle to customers, we opened a store and sell beef cuts to the public."

Living 15 minutes from the metropolitan areas of Springfield Mass., and Hartford, Conn., was ideal for an urban market to begin. In 2009 Broad Brook Beef and Pork was established.

The Holdens market 45 Hereford-based steers a year to the local community through farmers' markets and their on-farm store, as well as supply five high-end restaurant partners and their subsidiaries.

Every month, the Holdens also provide 40 lb. of beef for a learning lab through the Salvation Army.

"We are still extremely passionate about Hereford genetics and showing — and we pay for it now through our growing beef sales," Holden says.

These three New England Hereford enthusiasts say many advantages, as well as a few challenges, can be found raising cattle on the East Coast.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUBLE H ACRES

The Holdens market 45 Hereford-based steers a year to the local community through farmers' markets and their on-farm store, as well as supply five high-end restaurants and their subsidiaries.

New England and Herefords — a nice duo

Aside from the gorgeous views of mountains and lakes, Fredrickson says, the New England region offers advantages in milder summer temperatures and conditions.

“The winters can be brutal at times with lots of snow and extremely cold weather,” he says. “But other parts of the country have their own issues with that, as well.”

The grazing is often plentiful, Fredrickson says, as grasses grow well in most years due to good moisture.

With a close proximity to many urban areas, New England breeders have a somewhat unique opportunity to advocate for the beef industry, while also providing locally sourced beef for urban consumers.

“Especially today, with the advent of locally sourced and community-sustained food, the surrounding community has become very receptive to farms, and we have a great market for our locally sourced beef,” Fitzpatrick says. “Many breeders in the area, regardless of their primary market, also offer freezer beef.”

Holden agrees. The urban location of many New England Hereford operations can serve as a benefit.

“We are able to sell to our local community and take advantage of the fact we are surrounded by community,” he says. “Prior to 2009, when we began our meat business, we needed supplemental income to support our farm. But now the farm is a standalone business. I’ve lived out West – in Kansas and eastern Colorado – and there are many desolate areas. There are hundreds of thousands of cows, but not the people to purchase meat from the farm or ranch.”

The urban location can provide challenges of its own, as well.

The challenges of New England

Because of the close proximity to densely populated areas, Fitzpatrick says, environmental stewardship is of even greater importance.

“We are more densely populated than in the Midwest or West,” he says. “We have to be cognizant of good farming practices, such as manure spreading, and the storage and use of pesticides. We have more eyes watching.”

The higher population also leads to higher property taxes and higher property values, with undeveloped land selling for an average of \$15,000 per acre in some areas. This equates to fewer opportunities for expansion, Holden says.

“We have to also deal with population issues, as many farms get sold to be turned into subdivisions,” he says. “This leads to noise and odor complaints.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OLD BECH FARM

Despite the mild summer months, New England winters can be brutal and pose challenges for cattle producers.

Luckily, our family has had the same neighbors since 1977, so we don’t have that problem.”

In the past more commercial operations in the range of 200-head herds existed in New England, Fitzpatrick says. Today, those operations are few, with many in the 30- to 50-head range.

Because the number of cattlemen in New England is low, prices for Hereford genetics are also on the lower side, Holden says.

“We just aren’t able to market show cattle for the prices you can get in the Midwest,” he says. “We have a lot more people in our area, but a lot less farmers, which means a lot fewer people to sell live cattle to.”

The distance from many feed sources also leads to higher costs of feed, Holden says.

“We have a six-month growing season with grasses that typically grow in the spring and fall,” he says. “Many of our crops and our fertilizer must be delivered from the Midwest, so we have to pay for the trucking as well.”

Fitzpatrick says diverse weather conditions in his area can provide some challenges — with hot, humid summers and snow and ice in the winters — but, he says, the small herd size can be a benefit.

“We do have the ability to get the animals out of the elements,” Fitzpatrick says. “I’m sure you can’t put 1,000 head into a barn in Texas.”

Progressive producers

Fitzpatrick says despite some possible misconceptions, New England Hereford breeders are progressive and knowledgeable.

“New England breeders are on top of their game,” he says. “We are well educated on genetics and breeding, and that has certainly evolved over the past 10-20 years.”

Holden says New England Hereford breeders are dedicated to breeding quality genetics. And he and Fredrickson agree — the judges of their regional shows have taken notice.

“Many times, the judges who come to our shows from other parts of the country comment they are really surprised with the quality of the cattle,” Fredrickson says. “We don’t have the numbers found in other parts of the country, but we certainly do have the quality.” **HW**