

Reviving and Thriving



The Beach family from the Buckeye State have found a good fit in raising Hereford cattle.

by *Amy Beth Graves*

After the end of fair season, Jeff Beach would walk past his barn and shake his head. The 4-H dairy heifers were long gone, and the barn, once filled with life, now only stored memories of animals and lessons learned.

“Dad would get all upset and say it was wrong for us to have this big barn and nothing in it. So, we decided to do something about that,” says his 18-year-old daughter, Schelby.

The northwestern Ohio family decided to start a cow-calf herd on the family’s land that had once been used for raising bird dogs and hunting. That decision was easy. What breed to raise was a



tougher question to answer. Just down the road were Shorthorns and in the other direction were Angus-Charolais crossbreeds and in yet another direction were Herefords.

“It was a sit down and decide what type of breed you want moment,” Schelby says. Jeff and his wife, Nicole, turned to John Meents, a friend with whom they attended church and the American Hereford Association’s (AHA) field representative for Ohio and eight other states. Meents described the qualities of all the different cattle breeds and how they would fare on the family’s farm. After much consideration, the Beaches settled on the Hereford breed.

“Dad sent (John) on a mission to find a bred cow for us and we still have her,” Schelby says. “We chose Herefords because they’re purebred and we wanted that original genetic line. Plus their demeanor is nice.”

Building a family farm

Starting a Hereford operation was quite the undertaking for the family, which hadn’t been living on Nicole’s family farm very long. They moved there in 2012 after Nicole’s father had unexpectedly died at age 61. While Nicole had grown up on the farm and Jeff in a nearby town, they’d been living the suburban life for several years in Norton, a city two hours to the east. It was the only way of life that Schelby and her younger brother, Gavin, knew except for the trips they had made to visit their grandparents.

Before she knew it, Schelby found herself trading in her tennis racket for a cow halter. It was a big change, but one she quickly embraced. What the then 14-year-old really wanted to do was become involved in 4-H and show an animal at the Hancock County Fair. Jeff called a local 4-H club to inquire about purchasing a beef feeder but switched to dairy after learning how big the dairy program was at the fair. Everything came full circle when he ended up buying heifers from a dairy he used to work at when he was a teenager.

“When I was in high school, I used to bale hay at a dairy because it paid really well. At the end of the day at 10 p.m., they would make dinner and part of that was always milkshakes made with the original milk. So, I worked for money, dinner and milkshakes,” Jeff laughed.

“And friendship as it turned out,” his wife quickly adds.

Schelby had showing success right off the bat – she ended up with reserve champion at the county fair. Schelby threw herself into her new lifestyle, and before she knew it, she was in two 4-H clubs, on the junior fair board and involved with FFA.

Working with cattle was also a new experience for Jeff, who had never been involved with 4-H or FFA and works behind a desk. For 20 years he’s worked for Evonik Industries, one of the world’s leading specialty chemical companies. He’s an automotive market manager for fuel system materials, which are sold to major car manufacturers, including a large Honda plant 40 miles to the south.

“I was kind of surprised how much I liked the animals in general, and five or so years into it,

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— Schelby Beach



The Beach family started a Hereford operation without extensive experience and soon found their lifelong passion.

I can honestly say you either like them or you don’t because otherwise you wouldn’t be into it,” Jeff says.

Herefords fitting in

Today, Thornbriar Farm, has about 15 head of Herefords with calving done in the spring and fall because Jeff likes “having two paychecks a year.” The cattle are marketed at different sales including the Switzerland of Ohio Polled Hereford Association, the Ohio State Fair, the Ohio Beef Expo, the Kentucky Beef Expo and even Craigslist.

“We’ve had a lot of good luck with Craigslist in selling bulls. It’s a tool that seems to really work for us,” Nicole says.

The Beaches particularly like going to the Ohio Beef Expo because not only do they have success in selling their animals, but the show attracts crossbreeders who are interested in adding Hereford

genetics to their herds. In 2015 Schelby had reserve champion Hereford cow-calf at the show and has had other success including grand champion calf club steer and champion beef feeder at the 2016 county fair.

As for the Beaches, they love living in Hancock County, which is a mix of agriculture and manufacturing. The city Findlay is headquarters for the Marathon Petroleum Corp. and Cooper Tire & Rubber Co., and a large Whirlpool plant is also located there.

“At one time northwestern Ohio was basically the Saudi Arabia of the world. At one point Findlay had so much natural gas that pipes on the

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The Beach family has encountered show success and hopes to only continue raising quality Hereford cattle for years to come.

ground on (Findlay's) main street were flaming with gas. The story is that in the winter it never had snow or was frozen because so much gas was burning off," Jeff says.

But despite the large amount of manufacturing, Findlay retains its small-town feel, Nicole says.

"It's still a small and close knit community. There are a lot of mom-and-pop stores and the city is very adamant about continuing to support local entrepreneurs, little boutiques and restaurants on top of Marathon and Cooper," Nicole says.

Living in an area where row crops are the main agricultural industry, followed by hogs and dairy, can be challenging at times for a cattle producer.

"We have to travel over an hour to get good cattle supplies and we keep over-the-counter (medical) supplies on hand because there are only two, maybe three bovine vets in the area," Nicole says.

The Beaches have relied on Meents and other friends to help them start and improve their

Hereford operation. When they had trouble breeding a cow that wouldn't take to artificial insemination (AI), Meents put them in contact with a Hereford producer almost 100 miles away who took in the cow for two months. The bull she was finally bred to later won the Ohio State, Michigan and West Virginia State Fairs, and the Beaches ended up with a bull calf that they took to Kentucky.

"There are people out there willing to help. We didn't know anything about fitting or trimming or minerals when we started out," Nicole says. "People have been very open to saying 'maybe you should think about doing this' and not in an aggressive, competitive way."

Matters in the Midwest

Heavy rainfall and mud have been challenging for the Beaches and other area farmers. Last year, the family put in a heavy-use pad that makes it easier for the cattle and family to work with each other. Because the farm was used to raise and train bird dogs, it needed wooded, overgrown areas to provide habitats for quail and other wildlife. The Beaches kept those berms, which help prevent flooding and keep manure out of waterways, in place along a creek. The county is part of the Western Lake Erie Watershed, which falls under a state law restricting the application of manure and fertilizer on frozen, snow-covered or saturated ground. The law is designed to curb nutrients which can contribute to harmful algae blooms in Lake Erie from entering waterways.

For Schelby, the move to the farm has had a major impact on her life — she plans to pursue a career in agriculture. In the fall she starts at Ohio State University's Agricultural Technical Institute, where she will major in animal science beef.

"I'll work on the cattle there and then come home on the weekends and work on my own cattle," she says. She's excited that this summer she will be taking two heifers to the Junior National Hereford Expo in Louisville, Ky., her first time showing in that competition.

Both Jeff and Nicole love the lifestyle their children are experiencing on the farm, saying they're learning the value of hard work and about the circle of life.

"We've had life here but we've also had death here and it helps solidify this reality that life is full of life and death. The idea that a cow is born for a particular purpose and was born so you can have life ties in with our beliefs that Jesus came and died so you could have life," Jeff says. "It brings a biblical teaching into a real touchable, tangible thing in a way that talking about it forever you can't do. It lets you talk about the realities of life that you don't talk about as much." **HW**



Heavy rainfall and mud have been constant challenges for producers in the Midwest this year.