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# A Real-World Experience



Since 2003 the CSU Seedstock Merchandising Team has exhibited a Hereford pen at the National Western.

*Participating in CSU's Seedstock Merchandising Team gives students seedstock marketing and management experience.*

*by Angie Stump Denton*

Students at Colorado State University (CSU) can gain hands-on experience in the seedstock industry by participating on CSU's Seedstock Merchandising Team. The program was started five years ago, expanding on the student-assisted sale.

Tom Field, CSU animal science professor, serves as the team's advisor. "The program teaches students about the team concept and how to promote a product," Field says. "The great thing is it uses our cattle to promote our students in a real-world setting."

The CSU livestock program consists of 150 head of cattle, 200 sheep and a 500-head feedlot. The herd includes about 50 Herefords.

This year CSU will host its 30th student-assisted sale. Prior to the development of the Seedstock Merchandising Team, students would help with sale preparation during the spring semester. According to Field the decision to start the yearlong team concept was made so that the students could learn more about the complexities of the seedstock business. "Students are part of all the decisions other than genetics," Field says.

Each year nine to 12 students are selected to serve on the team. It is comprised of mostly juniors and seniors and the students earn four college credit hours for their work.

We are looking for students with a passion for the seedstock business, a good work ethic, and the willingness and commitment to dedicate a lot of time and energy, Field explains. To participate in the program students go through an application process.

Serving on the team does not require a seedstock or fitting and showing background. According to Field the team is typically comprised of two or three students with communication, advertising or promotion experience; two-thirds have some experience with cattle; and a few have fitting and cattle handling experience.

Erin O'Malley, a member of the 2004-05 team, had no cattle experience prior to joining. "Being on the team is an awesome experience," says Erin, who hopes to be a lawyer someday. "I've had the opportunity to work with amazing people — students and faculty. They are future leaders of the industry."

Students assist with three main events — the National Western Stock Show, Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show, and the CSU Sale. They also typically help with one or two beef industry meetings each year. In the fall of 2005 the students assisted with the Angus Bootcamp.

The team has a chance to participate in event planning, advertising — print and radio — and to help with sale book development and three newsletters.

The team is split into committees — display, newsletter, catalog and advertising. Students dedicate about six hours per week to the team — two hours in a weekly meeting and the rest working on activities.

Kasey Crumley, Akron, Colo., a member of the 2004-05 team, says, "It's a team approach; everyone has different talents, which helps us develop a productive product."

### The National Western

The team starts the fall semester learning about breeding and seedstock philosophy. Early in the semester students pick out the bulls they will exhibit in Denver. For the last three years the team has exhibited a Hereford and Angus pen in the Yards, and the



Students assist with the CSU booth during the Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show.

Below: In 2005 CSU's high-selling bull was a Hereford selling to Olsen Ranches Inc. and Dr. Don Cain for \$15,000.

team displayed cattle in the Yards the two years prior to that.

During the selection process the students learn about Hereford and Angus pedigrees and expected progeny differences (EPDs).

While exhibiting at the National Western the students take turns managing the pen bulls. Some team members arrive at 5:30 a.m. to feed the bulls and others arrive at 7 a.m.

The team also has a display board in their pen at the Stock Show that promotes the CSU herd and the University.

### NCBA booth

During the Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show the students promote the CSU program with a booth in the Trade Show.

Assisting with the booth is another networking opportunity for the students.

Trevor Amen, Fort Morgan, Colo., a member of the 2005-06 team, says, "Helping with the NCBA booth and at the Stock Show is a great way to make a lot of valuable contacts. Being part of the team provides us stepping stones as we look for jobs."

The students learn the basics of cattle marketing and at the same time learn how to market themselves. Marianna Brown, Bard, N.M., a member of the current team, says, "It's a great opportunity to learn how to market ourselves."

### The sale

The students' work and learning culminate with the bull sale. The 2006 sale is scheduled for March 25. The



sale will include 12 Hereford and 30 Angus bulls.

The sale targets mostly commercial producers but some seedstock producers have bought top-end bulls in the past. In 2005 CSU sold a Hereford bull for \$15,000 to Olsen Ranches Inc., Harrisburg, Neb., and Dr. Don Cain, Broken Bow, Neb.

Students assist with all facets of the sale, from advertising and sale book design to setting up the sale ring and clerking the sale. It's a practical learning experience.

A key component to the experience is learning about customers and understanding what they are looking for when buying bulls.

"Most of our customers are smaller producers with off-farm income and don't have time for hassle or mistakes," Field says. "Our customers' tolerance for problems is zero. The bull buyer of the future wants cattle that will work for them and make calving easy."

The students seem to understand the needs of their customers; their motto the last three years has been, "Calving Ease Plus — Where Cattle and College Go Hand in Hand." **HW**

