

Kuehn on Herefords

Cattleman Bill Kuehn's lifelong dedication to feeding Herefords earned him this year's AHA Hereford Innovator Award.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



Raised in the Hereford business, Bill Kuehn (pronounced keen) says his love of Herefords began as a youth. He bought his first Hereford heifer when he was a freshman in high school as an FFA project. Then as a junior, he and his dad, John, partnered on 11 Hereford feeder steers. That was Bill's first foray into the cattle feeding business.

Now, some 50-plus years later, Bill was honored with a Hereford Innovator Award by the American Hereford Association (AHA). Bill, co-owner of WRK Herefords Inc. and Kuehn Feedlot, Heartwell, Neb., and Sweetwater Cattle Co., Kearney, Neb., was presented with the award at the National Western Stock Show Hereford Carload and Pen Show in Denver, Jan. 15.

Bill's learned a lot since his FFA days, but he has remained true to the Hereford breed. "I've always had Hereford cows ever since that first heifer," Bill says. Bill went into a 50-50 partnership with his father after Bill



Larry has dedicated his life to the Hereford industry.

married Kay in 1966. They had three boys — Chris, Larry and Billy — all of whom helped with the farm and cattle throughout childhood. The family Hereford business grew from 20 head to 180, and John and Bill bought and fed many, many pens of cattle. When John passed away in the early 1990s, Bill's eldest son, Chris, joined him in partnership.

Now the pair operates WRK Herefords, which includes 180 Hereford cows, of which about 100 are registered. They sell a few bulls and feed out their own steers.

Bill's three brothers are also in the cattle business, and all live close. "There are four of us here within a mile," Bill says. "There's lots of teamwork and helping each other out."

One of Bill's brothers and his son are partnered with Bill and Chris on the 1,500-head Kuehn feedlot, which John started decades ago. Now, instead of finishing cattle in their own lot, the Kuehns use it as a backgrounding yard to start their own Hereford cattle and those they buy. Then the cattle are finished at Sweetwater Cattle Co., in nearby Kearney.

Bill bought into Sweetwater Cattle Co., which is a 14,000 head

commercial yard, managed by co-owner Mike Twitchell. All in all, Bill purchases and feeds about 6,000 Hereford and Hereford-cross calves a year. All of the cattle that qualify are sold to National Beef Packing Co. for the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) program. Bill has been participating in the CHB program since its inception.

"When CHB began, my father and Chris actively participated in the program and found an additional benefit of their Hereford-based business," says Larry Kuehn, Bill's middle son and geneticist at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center, Clay Center, Neb. "I'd say they were some of the pioneering participants in the program. The CHB program grid gave them an opportunity to market beef with good yield premiums and without high concentrate feed costs."

Bill says he prefers feeding Herefords. "Their cost of gain, the way they gain, their handle-ability, temperament, all those things make a difference," he says. "There's many, many people I know in the Hereford business, and I love them all. God bless each of them. I feel totally honored by this award."

Larry adds, "I'm excited that Dad is receiving this award and that his innovative nature is being recognized. I hope that Dad continues to have opportunities to lead and innovate in the feedlot that he has invested in. I know that his future will continue to involve Herefords and CHB." **HW**



Mike Twitchell is co-owner of Sweetwater Cattle Co., and manages the yard.