



Herefords and FFA

Hereford juniors Krissi McCurdy and Bethany Nolan never guessed an FFA project would land them at the top of national competition. But, a willingness to learn and seize opportunities in the Hereford breed led them there.

by **Jill Johnson**

“Learning to Do, Doing to Learn...” These words are the building blocks of the National FFA Organization’s mission and motto. For two National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members, they are more than just a couple of catchy phrases learned as an FFA member — they describe a learning experience that has enabled both individuals to walk away winners.

Krissi McCurdy and Bethany Nolan turned a passion for Hereford cattle into award winning Supervised Agriculture Experiences (SAE). Both girls were finalists in the beef entrepreneurship category — one of the 47 FFA proficiency areas offered nationally — at the 2011 National FFA Convention in Indianapolis.

Krissi, Chatsworth, Ga., and Bethany, Gilmer, Texas, went up against other FFA members working for experience and herd expansion.



Krissi and Bethany on stage during the 2011 National FFA Convention in Indianapolis.

Krissi and Bethany both say it was a surprise to be named a national finalist. Bethany adds it had always been a dream, but she never thought it was attainable. But, it was rewarding for both as all of their hard work paid off.

The road to nationals

Making it to the National FFA Convention as an SAE finalist is a huge accomplishment. Krissi and Bethany agree SAEs are designed to provide real world experiences and to develop skills in agriculturally related career areas. FFA members select a project and begin keeping record books their freshman year in high school. They explain they recorded everything including daily feedings, veterinary care and marketing strategies.

Both girls say their record books were very detailed and took a lot of time to complete, but all of that time is the reason they advanced to the district, state and national levels of competition.

“There is an application and interview process at each level,” Bethany says. “The interviews at nationals were very intense. We were asked very specific questions pertaining to our operation and the current industry situation for the region we live in.”

When it became time for Krissi and Bethany to declare their SAE as an FFA member, it was natural for them to start with a beef entrepreneurship program, they agree. Their SAEs revolved around their love of Hereford cattle.

Krissi’s project

Krissi started her operation when she was 7 years old — just old enough to begin showing. The first



Krissi utilized artificial insemination in her herd, giving her access to superior Hereford genetics. Pictured here she is inserting CIDRs as part of her estrus synchronization program.

year of her SAE, she owned four head of Hereford cattle.

Krissi set goals for her operation. She said she wanted to improve genetics, increase ribeye area and implement marketing strategies.

Krissi said her record books focused on achieving her goals and herd management.

“I decided to manage my four cows in a fall- and early spring-calving program,” Krissi says. “Then, I weaned the calves and decided which animals to keep for replacement heifers.”

Krissi says she was able to expand her herd from four to 20 head by her senior year of high school.

“I was surprised that my record books made it to the national finals because I have such a small herd, but I was able to show growth, and that’s what counts,” she explains.

Not only did she expand her operation, but she turned it into a business.

“I worked for my grandpa to help pay for expenses,” she says. “He is like my business partner. I made the

decisions with the cattle and exchanged labor for financial assistance.”

Krissi says as she increased her herd numbers, she was able to focus on her goals. She recognized the importance of the Hereford breed in the current commercial cattle industry and the push toward improved genetics. She wanted to help grow the market demand for Hereford beef and started with her herd.

“I wanted to improve my herd’s genetics in general to achieve a genetically strong Hereford cow base, but I also wanted to increase carcass traits,” she explains. “For the purpose of my record book, I focused on increasing ribeye area. I knew I could use the ribeye to market cattle to the commercial industry because, in my experience, consumers want a bigger ribeye.”

Krissi says she used ultrasound technology to measure the ribeye area, and once she started achieving her goal of a 14-inch ribeye, she marketed bulls to local commercial producers. She says the national SAE judges were intrigued by her interest in carcass traits and the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) program.

“I had a lot of fun in my interview at nationals because the judges asked me so many questions about Hereford beef,” she says. “I was an ambassador for the breed that day, and it was exciting to be a part of the Hereford industry. I was able to discuss the benefits and great qualities of Hereford cattle.”

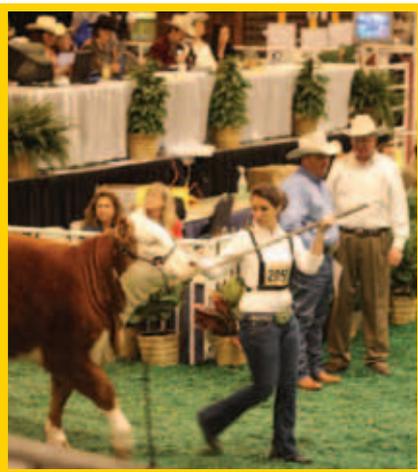
Krissi also accomplished the goal of marketing her cattle. She stated in her record books her love of showing and her desire to be on the NJHA board of directors. She was elected a director at the 2011 Junior National Hereford Expo.

Bethany’s project

Bethany became involved with the Hereford breed when she was 9 years old. She began her SAE with 25 head and implemented a spring- and fall-calving program.

She says she developed her business with the help of her dad — trading labor for feed expenses.

Her record books focused on utilizing artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) to expand her herd, implementing marketing strategies, developing communications skills and



Bethany has spent many hours in the showing — at the halter of Hereford cattle and serving as the 2010-11 National Hereford Queen.

becoming more knowledgeable of daily farm practices.

Bethany says the first goal she needed to tackle was learning basic farm efficiencies. She learned how to operate farm equipment, how to develop the appropriate feed ratios and, all too quickly, how weather affects cattle producers.

“I had to learn how to manage my herd in the Texas drought, while still expanding my operation and accomplishing my goals,” Bethany explains. “Luckily, I was raising efficient Herefords, and with the help of my family, I created a program that worked. I was up to 70 head of cattle by my senior year for nationals.”

She says she had an interest in using AI and ET to help grow her herd. Her dad is certified to perform AI and helped her learn about these methods. She achieved a 60% ET conception rate and a 70% AI conception rate.

Bethany has a passion for communications, which she implemented into her record books. She says she wanted to become a better communicator and developed marketing strategies in order to gain communications experience.

“I developed magazine ads, managed the Bethany Herefords website and arranged consignments in the Ft. Worth National Cowtown

Select Sale,” she says. “I was able to market and sell 15% of my herd each year and at the same time became a skilled communicator.”

Bethany also used these communications skills as the 2010-11 National Hereford Queen.

Advice

Krissi and Bethany strongly encourage youth considering the NJHA and the FFA to get involved, even if they are starting small.

“You just have to go into everything with the attitude that you can do it and you have something to offer,” Bethany says. “Be proud of the breed and proud you are a part of such a great industry.”

Krissi says it’s a matter of setting goals and sticking to them.

“Push yourself and be ready for a lot of hard work, but know in the end you will reap the benefits and will have fun along the way,” she adds.

Krissi and Bethany agree while it was exciting to be national finalists, it was even better to be there with a friend.

“Being together at national convention as finalists was so much fun,” they say. “The FFA and NJHA give you a lot of opportunities and experiences, but you gain lifelong friendships as well. It was a breath of fresh air to be by each others’ sides as Hereford girls.”

The future

Krissi is currently a freshman at Butler Community College, majoring in elementary education, and is part of the livestock judging team.

A Texas A&M University Aggie, Bethany is a freshman in agricultural communications and journalism. She is an active member of the Saddle & Siroloin Club and the Zeta Tau Alpha sorority.

They both say they plan to continue building their Hereford operations and stay active within the breed. **HW**

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— Bethany Nolan