

Oklahoma Breeders Promote Hereford Beef

In late March I had the opportunity to participate in an event that turned out to be one of the best Hereford breed promotional events I've ever seen. United Supermarkets, a 26-store regional independent grocery chain located throughout Oklahoma, committed to utilizing Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) as their feature beef brand.

Ken Gracey, the veteran United Supermarkets meat operations director, had been looking for a brand of beef that would differentiate them in their market. Interestingly enough, the United Supermarkets chain is located in several rural communities across western Oklahoma as well as a few areas in the northeast part of the state. In a few of those communities, United Supermarkets is the only grocery store in the area serving rural ranching families. So when Gracey and the United Supermarkets ownership decided to have CHB as their premium brand, it seemed to be a wonderful opportunity to promote the program and at the same

time promote the Hereford breed in a very influential cow country area.

Hereford breeders and members of the Oklahoma Hereford Association (OHA) were asked to participate in the CHB product launch to show enthusiasm for the efforts of United Supermarkets.

Approximately a dozen Oklahoma breeders invested their own money to support a CHB product launch in two communities. Gracey planned a kick-off promotional fund-raiser at United Supermarkets' Ponca City store. The event's purpose was to draw attention to the CHB product offering as well as to raise money for the Ponca City FFA chapter to help fund the group's trip to the State FFA Convention. In addition, part of the proceeds was shared with the OHA to fund scholarships for the top exhibitors in the annual Hereford heifer show at the Oklahoma Youth Expo.

The OHA and its members stepped up to the challenge to raise sponsorship money to pay for the CHB that was prepared for the promotional steak sandwich campaign. At least half a dozen breeders actually came to the Ponca City event to help out with the promotion. Harry, an inflatable Hereford bull, was raised in front of the store. Kevin Frazier, Ponca City FFA advisor, brought in beef cookers, and about 15 FFA members helped to set up a terrific event in front of the store. The Ponca City youth did a fantastic job of working the event. Most of them had no ties to Hereford cattle, but after that day they had a

much different perception of the Hereford breed.

As we gathered in the grocery store parking lot serving guests, raising money, promoting beef, I couldn't help but think that for many of the Hereford breeders who participated, this was the first real tangible evidence that a beef product they represent was actually being promoted and sold to the consuming public. The CHB logo was prominent on the side of boxed beef that was stacked to the ceiling of the supermarket cooler. When they toured the backroom meat-cutting operation, there were steaks being cut by expert hands and trays being wrapped, priced, labeled with the CHB logo and merchandised in the meatcase with a well thought out point-of-sale strategy. The program began to come alive right in front of their eyes.

It's rare that we as producers get the opportunity to interact with the end users of our product. This beef promotion was a golden opportunity for all of us involved to gain a better understanding of how the food system works.

An independent regional retailer like United Supermarkets can have an enormous effect on our business. The company is expected to utilize approximately 2 million lb. of CHB boxed beef per year, accounting for more than \$6 million in sales.

The CHB launch once again reaffirmed that producers utilizing range resources to produce cattle are a lot closer to the consumer than they think.

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Craig Huffhines



Members of the Ponca City FFA chapter served CHB smoked tri-tip sandwiches at the north-side United Supermarkets grocery store to earn money for a trip to the State FFA Convention in late April.