

Keeping on Target

AHA President Jack Holden leads the Association with passion and drive, and is dedicated to regaining commercial market share.

by **Angie Stump Denton**

A third-generation Hereford breeder, Jack Holden of Valier, Mont., says market signs show that the Hereford breed has momentum heading in the right direction. "It's time to get aggressive and take the reins," Holden says. "We need to push as an Association to regain market share. It's not going to come and fall in our lap. We have to stay focused and keep moving forward."

As president of the American Hereford Association (AHA), Holden drives commercial marketing and breed improvement initiatives for the Hereford breed. "His early involvement in the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) program along with his past chairmanship of the AHA breed improvement committee made him the ideal AHA leader for our times," explains Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president.

To set the course of the future, the AHA Board, industry advisors and AHA staff met in April 2005 to set goals and initiatives for the next five years. "The Strategic Plan gave us a map of what we need to do as a Board and staff to keep on target," Holden says.

Holden assumed the role as AHA president in January 2005 after the loss of then AHA President Richard Hudson. Holden was elected to continue serving as president at the Annual Meeting in October 2005.

Jack and his wife, Tresha, have two children — Brooke, 16, and Brad, 13. Together they manage Holden Herefords. Jack's grandparents, Les and Ethel, founded the ranch in 1947. In 1987 Jack assumed management and worked closely with his grandfather for the next 11 years.

"The Holden Hereford operation has been one of the most performance-minded and disciplined Hereford seedstock operations in the country for nearly half a century," Huffhines says. "Jack inherited his work ethic and commitment to beef cattle



Jack Holden, American Hereford Association (AHA) president, was elected to the AHA Board in 2002. While on the Board he has served as chairman of the breed improvement committee and on the Hereford Publications Inc. board. During his tenure, the Association has introduced \$Profit Indexes, the Hereford Verified program and the Non-Certificate AI Sire program.



Holden Herefords is a family operation. Pictured are: Jack, Tresha, Brad and Brooke.



Holden and Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president, work together leading the Association.

performance from his Grandfather Les Holden, who was a pioneer in beef cattle breed improvement. As a young man, Jack has a terrific understanding of the entire beef cattle business."

The Holden breeding program is based on Line 1 genetics, and the family strives to produce predictable genetics that will work for their customers. For more information about Holden

Herefords and Jack's start in the business see, "Holden at the Helm," page 26, July 2005 *Hereford World*.

"Discipline is a word that best describes Jack's leadership and breeding program," says Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement. "With Holden Herefords Jack is continuing a program that was built with a strong foundation and a disciplined plan. It is not easy to stay a course in a linebreeding program, but Jack has done a great job.

"As for his disciplined leadership, I think it is just as clear. He was chairman of the breed improvement committee for two years and he was always stating that the groundwork we are setting today will be how we build in the future. The programs we have instituted are structured for continual growth of the breed."

Following are Jack's thoughts regarding where we are as a breed and where we are heading.

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Q How would you summarize the last 12 months?

A We've had a lot of ups and downs as an industry the last 12 months — the reopening of the export markets and then Japan closing down again. There have been a lot of issues facing the industry, including BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) and national animal identification. Stabilization industrywide would help.

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With source and age verification becoming more important, Hereford Verified is going to be a crucial program to help producers meet those requirements. It is a great program that allows producers to get data back from the feedlot and the rail, and see what their cattle are doing. Producers receive information, feedback and premiums for being involved.

The new Non-Certificate AI Sire program, which was implemented in April, will give our breeders an opportunity to move their genetics forward with access to artificial insemination (AI) sires without the expense of certificates. Our hope as a Board is that the program will increase AI use of high-accuracy, balanced-trait sires, thus improving the quality and consistency of cattle throughout the breed.

Q What are some key issues/challenges facing the agriculture, beef and Hereford industries?

- A**
- 1) Urbanization and consolidation; we're losing farms and ranches.
 - 2) High input costs.
 - 3) National ID is going to change the way people do business.
 - 4) There are other cattle breeds that want to capture market share just like we do. We've got to continue moving forward and keep ahead of our competitors.
 - 5) Hereford leaders and members need to embrace technology and use it to improve their cattle and our Association.

Q When you were elected to the Board, what were your goals for the Association? How have they changed?

A My goal was to do what I could to help the Hereford breed regain its position as the No. 1 beef breed in America. That goal has not changed the four years I've served on the Board. Herefords have always been my family's livelihood; they've been good to us. I've tried to be open minded and work to move our breed forward, striving to gain back the commercial market share we once had. My hope was to help improve our position in the industry while keeping the Association financially stable.

My term has been a satisfying experience. Our Board and staff constantly work together to make things better for our breed and our Association.

Q In April 2005 the Board developed a Strategic Plan; in your opinion how has the Board and staff worked to accomplish strategies?

A I think we've done a good job as a Board and staff taking hold of the plan and moving forward. The Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC staff is working every option available to grow the program. Hereford Verified will help achieve that goal, along with getting more retail stores to carry the product, and if the export market would open back up.

Another focus has been marketing and advertising. It's exciting to hire a dedicated communication coordinator who will work to communicate not only with membership but also the industry. This will help us become more targeted communicating the strengths of the breed.

The Online Hereford 101s are a great educational tool and an opportunity to get producers from across the U.S. involved and up-to-date.

We're also participating in several research studies to quantify the value of Herefords in crossbreeding systems, feed efficiency and longevity. These findings will help us prove the benefits of the Hereford breed.

Q As president what is your No. 1 priority to accomplish in the next six months?

A Maintain the health and well-being of the breed. Currently there is a lot of optimism. We are seeing a turnaround in perception in the industry, and we just need to keep moving forward as a breed.

Q What do we need to work on as a breed?

A We always need to strive to improve the quality of our cattle and continue to eliminate outliers that don't fit today's marketplace. As an Association we need

to continue to improve the perception of Herefords in the industry. We still continue to fight some of the old stereotypes.

It's important to make an effort to get our story out to commercial producers — Herefords are not the same as 10-15 years ago; the breed does a lot of things right from pasture to plate.

We also need to remain positive as a membership and work together as breeders with a unified presence. Members need to be at industry events and get the Hereford message out.

Q How do we gain commercial market share?

A First we have to have a good perception in the industry. Our cattle have to perform and do the job that is expected of them.

We need to promote our breed and its strengths, and reach out and get more producers to use Hereford genetics. The fact is we do have something to offer commercial cattlemen; we just have to convince them.

Q Of the programs offered by the Association, which do you think offers the most opportunities for members in the future?

A The main program that is going to carry our breed into the future is CHB LLC.

Cattle have to perform pasture to plate, and as a breed we have to have a brand that will carry us. CHB helps the Hereford breed accomplish these two goals.

Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) is another important program that will help us as a breed. As individual breeders we can all improve what we are doing and through Whole Herd TPR we can see where we sit and what we need to do to improve the genetics we are producing.

The junior program is the future of our breed. If we can help develop a love for Hereford cattle in today's youth then they can help carry on the breed.

Q How do you want people to remember you as AHA president?

A I hope I am remembered as a leader who worked for the members. I want people to think we did a good job as a Board keeping the breed moving forward, and developed and enhanced programs that led to Hereford capturing more market share, kept the breed growing in numbers while keeping the Association financially stable. I strived to be cognizant of what the membership wanted and what was best for the Association.

Q What do you consider to be the most important accomplishments the Association has achieved during your tenure as a director and officer?

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- 1) CHB has continued to grow.
 - 2) The Association has put together a superior staff. I'm extremely proud of the staff we have right now.
 - 3) Registrations have stabilized and are on the path toward increasing.
 - 4) Whole Herd TPR has really taken off.
 - 5) The junior program continues to grow with the largest junior show in the U.S.
 - 6) We've been able to accomplish all these things while maintaining financial stability of the AHA. **HW**

