



Joe Rickabaugh

*Director of field management
and seedstock marketing*

At national Hereford shows, showmen in red vests lead Hereford cattle through the ring in a timely fashion, stopping for a quick picture before heading back to the stalls. Each month, six American Hereford Association (AHA) fieldmen make calls and herd visits to encourage breeders to promote their programs and offer advice. Across the country white-faced cattle quickly move through sale rings to the rap-tap of a gavel and shouts from quick-eyed ringmen seeking the best price for the animal's owner.

Joe Rickabaugh, Topeka, Kan., is the man behind the scenes at these and other Hereford-related events. As director of field management and seedstock marketing, Joe's goal is to elevate the status of purebred Herefords. Originally hired as director of communication and membership service in 1999, his years of industry experience have been a great asset to the management team at AHA.

In 1982 Joe graduated from Kansas State University with a bachelor's degree in agricultural education. He participated on the livestock judging team and worked for two Hereford operations, performing artificial insemination (AI) work and regular farm tasks.

Following college, he served as the western field representative for the Kansas Livestock Association, gaining experience in advertising, member relations and purebred sales services.

From 1985 to 1995, he served as executive secretary of the purebred division, overseeing the Kansas Beef Expo, bull test, steer futurity, Young Stockmen's Leadership Conference, and Kansas Junior Livestock Show. He also represented purebred livestock interests at the state capital.

Next, Joe broadened his experience by managing Genetics Plus Inc., a company that supplied heifers bred with well-known genetics to commercial and seedstock producers.

Joe's position has evolved to include a variety of responsibilities geared toward increasing awareness of the Hereford breed. Joe's primary focuses are to advise and organize field staff, provide assistance at Hereford sales and oversee national shows.

As director of field management, Joe acts as an advisory figure to field staff. He helps the field staff create marketing plans and keeps them informed of learning opportunities that could benefit breeders in their respective regions.

"I encourage the fieldmen to build a knowledge base about their clients' programs," Joe says. "It's important for the field staff to make herd visits and to visit with as many breeders as possible at sales and shows, even though travel expenses have drastically increased."

Joe often serves breeders by working as a ringman at national and local Hereford sales.

"He is always working with breeders to help market their cattle no matter the size of the operation," says Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement. "He is just as driven whether it be a state consignment sale, national sale or a breeder's sale."

Along with organizing and promoting AHA-sponsored national sales, Joe coordinates catalogs for sales at Denver, Kansas City and Louisville.

"He works hard to make the national sales a success, getting quality cattle consigned and making every effort for a good sale," says Amy Cowan, AHA marketing and shows coordinator. "Joe is a great promoter of the Hereford breed, and we are fortunate to have him at sales and shows across the country helping

to increase the market share and enthusiasm for our breed."

Besides devotion to breed promotion, Joe strives to provide excellent customer service to clients as he helps them market their programs through Hereford Publications Inc.'s creative services projects. He bids projects like catalogs, fliers, and brochures on an individual basis, keeping in mind the best avenue for the client. "Clients are the lifeblood of our business — I try to treat them fairly and work hard to give them a pleasant experience with creative services," Joe says.

Joe tries to utilize national shows as an opportunity to promote the breed and communicate with breeders in person. "Shows are a big promotional arm for the seedstock industry," he says. "They give me the opportunity to visit face-to-face with breeders. I can also work with the field staff to help plan events with breeders who are there for the show."

Besides breed promotion and member relations, Joe helps ensure that shows progress in an orderly fashion.

"When it comes to national Hereford shows, Joe Rickabaugh is the real workhorse of our group, he is behind the scenes attending to every last detail of the show," Cowan says. "He goes above and beyond the call of duty to make sure the national shows are a great experience for exhibitors, spectators and everyone involved with the event. On show day after the cattle are checked in and stalled and the show programs are printed, Joe is usually behind the scenes lining up the classes, making sure the show runs very smoothly and efficiently."

The sincere and generous spirit of Hereford breeders, especially in relation to the juniors, is what makes Joe's work particularly satisfying. "On two occasions recently, I have witnessed breeders' willingness to support juniors by selling an animal they had just purchased at a sale," he recalls. "Those two transactions struck me as a tribute to the generosity of our breeders. That kind of support and generosity is what makes the Hereford breed great." **HW**