

# Inspired

*Orthopedic surgeon Dr. David Bielema may be new to the Hereford industry, but he's a quick study.*

by *Sara Gugelmeyer*



Dr. David Bielema likes to accomplish things. On any given day, that may include

reconstructing a worn-out knee, repairing a compound fracture or fixing fence. Dave is an orthopedic surgeon with a busy schedule of surgeries, patient exams and emergencies, but he enjoys his job and his Hereford cow herd for the same reason. "I like to work with my hands," Dave says. "I like to see something accomplished. I like the farm so much because I can see what I've accomplished. If you golf for fun, when the game's over, what do you have? If I work hard and build a fence, I have something to look at and know that I have accomplished something."

He's accomplished a lot since he began his career. Dave has been an orthopedic surgeon for

about 15 years since completing his undergraduate degree, medical school and a five-year residency. After finishing his residency in Detroit, he and his wife, Jill, along with their daughters, Lindsay, Kara and Kristin, moved to the Grand Rapids, Mich., area, only about an hour drive from where Dave grew up. He has been practicing there ever since.

Being a surgeon is nearly a 24-hour job. Dave is on call every fourth night, meaning he must be able to respond as quickly as possible should someone come to the emergency room in need of his care. In between he sees patients in the office, performs regularly scheduled surgeries and is on call during the day. "About half of what I do is take care of fractures, bone and joint injuries, and the other half is hip and knee reconstruction from arthritis or other problems," Dave says. "When I am in the office, I see patients with problems that may need surgery and follow up patients after surgery."

When asked about the exciting aspects of being a surgeon, Dave is quick to respond that he doesn't see it that way. "I think the most exciting surgeries are the ones that worked. So if patients have a problem and we help them and they are better for it, then that's what's important. The best surgery is the one I am doing right now, and that's really how I have to approach it because some things may seem small, but they are all important to the patient."

Between surgeries Dave and Jill have raised three daughters: Lindsay, 22; Kara, 19; and

Kristin, 15. Dave says he thinks it's important that his daughters recognize the value of hard work. That is one of the reasons he bought a farm about 10 years ago.

The girls got involved in showing cattle through 4-H, and it wasn't long before they had Hereford show heifers. "We showed Belted Galloways for a couple years, and when we got our first Herefords, we never really looked back," Dave says.

Lindsay took a heifer to the 2005 Junior National Hereford Expo in Wisconsin. Dave says at the junior national, "We were just really impressed by the people and the experience and the enthusiasm that everybody had. And ever since we've been doing the Hereford thing."

The Hereford thing for the Bielemas now consists of about 30 cows, from which they raise show prospects. The cows are all artificially inseminated, and for the last few years, the Bielemas have been using some embryo transfer.

Also, Dave's eldest daughter, Lindsay, was chosen the 2008 National Polled Hereford Queen, which Dave says was a great experience and opportunity for Lindsay and for the whole family as well. "We have had the opportunity to meet a lot of great people, and she has had a lot of opportunities as well to meet people and represent the Hereford breed."

The farm has been a great experience for the whole family as well, Dave says. Despite Dave's crazy work schedule, nearly all of the labor is done by the family themselves; they have no hired

help. "I want my kids to know how to work, I want them to understand that things don't come free and just because I have a good job doesn't mean they don't help," Dave says.

Going to the shows is also a family endeavor. "It means something that your whole family can go together and enjoy themselves," Dave says. "That's something special. This is something that our family can do together and we really cherish that."

He stresses that showing cattle, especially while Lindsay was also busy with her queen duties, has always been a family effort. Everyone pitches in to help each other out, he says.

The Bielemas have been in the Hereford business only about five years, but that hasn't slowed them down any. "I think sometimes when you are an outsider and you haven't been brought up in the industry, it's easier to sit back and learn something," Dave says. One thing he noticed was Hereford cattle weren't bringing as much at the sale barn as others.

"The ones that we don't keep, we sell," Dave says about his cattle. And the calves he raised that weren't quite good enough for the showing, Dave sold at the local sale barn at a discount.

Another problem Dave noticed was that although he saw great opportunity in selling feeder calves at the Greater Midwest Hereford Feeder Calf Sale in Carthage, Ill., he couldn't sell anything there because of Illinois' strict transportation rules because of bovine tuberculosis (TB).

So, Dave, Jerry Huth, Jim Williams and John Meents all collaborated on an idea of devising a Hereford feeder calf supply system in Michigan. "The way I look at it is Herefords in Michigan can't prosper if the breeders don't have an outlet for their cattle."

To remedy that problem, Dave has created what he is calling the

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Great Lakes Hereford-Influenced Supply System. He is planning to start buying Hereford and Hereford-influenced calves this fall and gather them in a growing yard in Michigan. Once he's got load lots of feeders weighing about 700 lb. the calves will be shipped to a Certified Hereford Beef participating feedlot in Nebraska or Kansas. Because they will be leaving Michigan and going to a terminal facility, the TB guidelines will be met.

Basically, Dave explains, he will be acting as a middleman to help create a marketplace for Hereford calves in Michigan. "The idea is to do this to help the breeders in our state, because if there's not a market for Herefords, it makes it hard to make a go of it," Dave says. "A lot of these breeders will sell bulls to producers with black cows, so if there's a CHB market, then



there's a place for those Hereford-influenced cattle to go."

Dave says he doesn't expect this business venture to be especially lucrative for him. The Hereford breed has provided a place where he and his family can enjoy spending time together, and in appreciation of that, it has inspired him to try to help the breed prosper. He says, "I want to give something back to the Hereford industry too." And hopefully this program's success will be something he can see accomplished as well. **HW**

**Editor's Note:** For more information on the Great Lakes Hereford-Influenced Supply System, contact Dave at (616) 292-7474 or visit [www.greatlakesherefordbeef.com](http://www.greatlakesherefordbeef.com).



Dave says he and his family enjoy their time together showing Herefords and working around the farm. Dave is pictured with his wife, Jill, and their three daughters (l to r) Kristin, Kara and Lindsay.