

Representative

Mary Ann Berg has served the Hereford breed through leadership and service.

by **Robin K. Kleine**

Dalton, Ohio, resident Mary Ann Berg is no stranger to hard work. The mother of four and grandmother of 11 is part of an eighth-generation farm, where she and her husband, Jerry, raise Hereford cattle. Besides calving approximately 40 cows each year and raising row crops, the couple runs a farm tax accounting service out of their home.

Through the years, both Mary Ann and Jerry have taken on roles in their local community and at their church and 4-H club as well as within the Buckeye Hereford Association.

Both Jerry and Mary Ann grew up in neighboring towns in Wayne County, Ohio, where their families raised dairy cattle. When they first married, they both worked off the farm as teachers, she in home economics and he in ag education.

“Once we purchased some land, we knew that when our daughter was 4-H age, she would need a project. Our operation, Berg Polled Herefords, started from that single 4-H beef project,” Mary Ann says.

Serving the Hereford breed

The Bergs have been members of the Buckeye Hereford Association for nearly 35 years. Additionally, Mary Ann first took an active role in the Buckeye Poll-ettes, helping with the queen program and other youth programs.



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— Mary Ann Berg

Later Mary Ann was asked to sit on a committee to meld the National Organization of Poll-ettes and the American Hereford Women. This newly united group — National Hereford Women (NHW) — was founded in 2009. Mary Ann says she is proud to be a founding member, has also served the group as president and now sits on the board as the ex-officio.

After reading an article asking for a Hereford enthusiast to promote Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) as a CHB Ambassador around the country, Mary Ann rose to the occasion. She said she thought both of the roles would blend well, as NHW sponsored the CHB Ambassador program.

After an interview in Kansas City, Mary Ann and Anna Rhodus from Missouri were selected as the first CHB Ambassadors. Kim Coley from Tennessee and Nicole Morrison from Ohio joined them as CHB Ambassadors in 2012.

“I felt that it fit into my niche in life right then — I’d be able to travel easily,” Mary Ann says. “They were looking for somebody wanting this adventure, and I wanted to prove to myself I could do it.”

The ambassadors each travel to different events across the country each year. They conduct various beef promotions and demonstrations, often at food shows, grocery stores or

supermarket grand openings. While there, they grill the beef and hand out samples, visiting with shoppers and educating them about beef and the CHB products.

With her background teaching about nutrition in the classroom, plus her time on the farm, it was not a stretch for Mary Ann to be an advocate for CHB.

"I said to Jerry, 'This is something I can do and feel at home. I know that I'm promoting a worthwhile product,'" Mary Ann adds.

She has traveled to the East Coast, Florida, Oklahoma, Washington State and many states in between. She also tries to help with promotions in her home state of Ohio. During her travels, she started a collection of state magnets for her refrigerator at home. The grandkids love looking at them and rearranging them, she says.

Spreading the word

Berg says that she has many talking points for her interactions with consumers. She talks about her farm and agricultural background, as well as the history of the Hereford breed. Consistency of CHB products and the promise of a delicious, nutritious product are also part of her demonstration.

"I tell them the great taste comes from the breed itself, and that we don't rely on marinades or a lot of fat to keep it flavorful," Mary Ann says.

After the grand opening of Miller's Markets in Lodi and New London, Ohio, in November 2012, Mary Ann shared her experience in a press release from CHB.

"The staff and shoppers were impressed that Nikki and I were producers who were willing to give of our time to promote a product we believed in. We accomplished our goal: good

will, good presentation and good promotion of a great product," Mary Ann explains.

Often Mary Ann and the other CHB Ambassadors are asked some tough questions including: Is it grassfed? Are the animals given antibiotics? How is your product different?

"We explain that a grain fed product gives a better taste and a higher quality product and that no animal in the CHB program can be on antibiotics at the time of slaughter," Mary Ann says. "We try to clarify that we treat our sick animals similarly to how anyone would treat a sick child."

Mary Ann's dedication to the Hereford breed hasn't gone unnoticed. Brad Ellefson, CHB LLC vice president of retail, complimented her as a CHB Ambassador and for her enthusiasm for the product.

"As part of the beef industry, I don't think people always realize that that retail and consumer side is part of it. But Mary Ann is



As a CHB Ambassador, Mary Ann assists with store promotions serving product and answering consumer questions. Here she is promoting CHB at the United Supermarkets roll-out in 2007.

always willing to ask questions and learn more about this side of the business," Ellefson says.

Personal benefits

Seeing the next generation showing enthusiasm for the Hereford breed is Mary

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Mary Ann (seated, far right) enjoyed serving as a CHB Grill-off judge during the 2010 Junior National Hereford Expo.

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Ann's favorite part of her responsibilities. This was evident when she judged the Great American CHB Grill-Off at the Junior National Hereford Expo



Jerry and Mary Ann Berg were inducted into the Buckeye Hereford Association Hall of Merit in 2010 after serving the organization for nearly 40 years.

(JNHE) as part of her CHB Ambassador duties.

"I really enjoyed judging the grill-off and skit, especially seeing the juniors standing up there, being cute and sharing good points about CHB and its quality," Mary Ann adds.

Her grandkids show and help on the family farm.

Berg Polled Herefords has also benefited from Mary Ann's positions, because she says they can promote their cattle from the road. Both Mary Ann and Jerry often travel to sales and shows, where it's easy to rekindle friendships with other producers from across the country.

"Our cow-calf operation is ongoing, and our friends and family want to help us so that we can travel together. They know that these shows are our vacations," Mary Ann says.

She was quick to say that especially in today's busy society with more people employed off the farm, there is limited time to give to organizations like the American Hereford Association.

"We, who are service-oriented, figure out how to arrange our time. We need to set an example for younger generations," she says.

Ellefson explains that Mary Ann is always happy to jump in and help where she is needed.

"Mary Ann has done a great job, kind of always being the leader. She has always been my go-to person," Ellefson says. "She's very knowledgeable and happy to grill steaks."

This can-do attitude has not been overlooked by her peers. In 2010 Jerry and Mary Ann attended the Buckeye Hereford Association annual banquet held in January, a routine event for the couple. When it was announced that they were to be inducted into the Buckeye Hereford Association's Hall of Merit, Mary Ann says they were "humbled and honored" by the award. The real surprise came when their entire family was at the restaurant to surprise them after it was announced.

"That made it all the more special," Mary Ann says.

Today, Berg continues to serve as a CHB Ambassador, fitting as many beef promotions as possible into her schedule. She also remains active in the NHW.

If you are interested in serving as a CHB Ambassador, please visit HerefordBeef.net. For more information about NHW, visit HerefordWomen.com. **HW**



Jerry and Mary Ann Berg pose with their family after they were announced as inductees into the Buckeye Hereford Association's Hall of Merit in 2010.