

JNHE Demonstrates a Great Breed Strength



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Once again the Hereford breed pulled off an incredible youth event with this year's Junior National Hereford Expo (JHNE), hosted in Louisville, Ky., at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center. Hats off and many thanks to all the state leaders involved in the fundraising and organizing of this huge event.

More than 600 National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members exhibited 1,213 entries, making the event one of the largest and most impressive single-breed shows in the world.

It takes dedicated youth and adult leaders to pull off such a major event, and the Hereford breed is fortunate to have people step up to meet the challenge. This year in particular was special as organizers and leadership came from more than one state.

While attending the show, I couldn't help but notice the number of junior members in the 7-10 age range. Our cover this month features one of these young people, 8-year-old Rylee Barber, who led the champion owned horned female.

There were several of these youngsters at the end of halter with just enough arm strength to keep the chins of their big yearling heifers to an attentive tilt. In the three days of bred-and-owned and owned show competitions, you rarely saw a spooked animal. We've all seen heifers or steers jerk loose even from young

adults. The kind of deal that usually involves cattle of another color and breed. But, the Hereford females led around the ring by our little giants were on their best behavior just easing their way around the ring like protective companions rather than the beasts of burden and food animals that they really are.

The gentle and quiet disposition that we all recognize as an inherent trait in Hereford cattle has a real commercial advantage. Not only are these cattle safer to be around than most other breeds, but there also are real economic benefits to the docile trait. Three areas where disposition is truly relevant to economics are: 1) beef quality, 2) feed efficiency, and 3) on-farm safety.

Research from the Australian beef industry has quantified the difference in tenderness of beef produced from docile cattle and high-strung cattle. There is a real and distinct tenderness advantage in beef produced by animals that tend to be more laid back in nature than those that are always nervous. Carcasses produced from cattle that ease out of a chute are sorted into a more tender quality class from those that bust through on a dead run.

Furthermore, there are metabolic efficiency advantages that can be attributed to gentle disposition cattle as opposed to those animals

that are high-stress and high-headed. Gentle cattle tend to have a stronger appetite and spend more time around the feed bunk, waste less energy in flight, and put more of their dietary energy into weight gain or body stores. It would stand to reason that gentle cattle might make more efficient mothers as well, although there is little research to prove such a theory. It just makes sense that an easygoing cow would maintain her flesh better than a cow that is constantly nervous.

The trait that many times we take for granted may have a higher value than we think. Docility bred into the Hereford breed for more than three centuries is something that all families, whether new to the business or experienced, can appreciate.

The Hereford breed also offers the right match of genetics to incorporate into commercial crossbreeding programs. As fuel, feed and fertilizer costs continue to escalate under the petroleum crunch, and as unpredictable drought conditions continue to challenge even the best producers, it makes sense to utilize the breed that has always been known as the champion of efficiency and disposition. Declaring the Hereford breed champion of these incredibly important traits is an obligation we all have as Hereford breeders promoting the breed to our neighbors and customers.

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