



Matt answers questions from Judge Cody Helms during the senior showmanship contest at this year's Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

Matt McCurdy, Chatsworth, Ga., was selected by his peers as the Herdsman of the Year at the 2006 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Louisville, Ky. He says, however, that he did not win this award alone, and that it was a group effort of long nights in the showbarn for the McCurdy family.

Getting his start

Matt, 22, started showing Herefords in the fall of 1996 after his family hosted the Georgia Polled Hereford Field Day at Leonard Polled Herefords, his family's Hereford operation.

"After watching the show, my cousins and I thought it would be fun to get a couple of heifers and start showing," says Matt.

The person to thank for getting Matt involved in the Hereford business is his granddad, Sherman Leonard. He gave each grandchild a heifer when they were 3 years old, and he also gave them a heifer after that fall day in 1996.

"Granddad told us that if we wanted to start showing then we better go and pick a heifer out," Matt remembers.

"Our family has been in the Hereford business for more than 58 years, and it's been a long-time tradition," Matt says. "But that tradition isn't why we are in the breed. We are in this for the docility of the

A Humble Thanks

2006 Herdsman of the Year Matt McCurdy attributes his success to the people who've paved the way for him.

by **Melissa Leander**

breed, but more importantly, the people who make the shows and sales so enjoyable."

Help at home

"If it weren't for my family, I wouldn't be where I am today," says Matt, a senior at Oklahoma State University.

Matt has one sister, Krissi, who is just as involved in the Hereford breed, and his parents, Don and Kay, who join in on the commitment of producing top-quality calves.

"Dad and Krissi stay late every night of the summer to rinse calves with me, and they also keep them looking good during the winter months when I'm gone to school," says Matt.

Kay helps with registering the calves and getting everything ready for the shows. Kay says her favorite moments have been at home with Matt and Krissi. "I've seen Matt put in the dedication and time to be a good cattleman," she says.

Matt thanks his grandparents the most for the opportunity to be a part of the family business. "My grandparents have allowed me to have such a great opportunity to be a part of this breed," he says.

A successful herdsman

Matt is a successful herdsman because of the time and dedication he puts into his work. His mom says that he was the kid who stayed at home nights to take care of the cattle.

"He was the kid in high school who would be in the showbarn every night and on weekend nights until 10 p.m.," Kay says. "He's just that dedicated."

Matt's hard work paid off big dividends with three class winners at this year's JNHE. In previous years, Matt has exhibited several champion bred-and-owned females at state and southeastern regional shows. Matt also displayed his fitting and showmanship skills when he won champion senior

showman at the 2005 Southeastern Regional Preview Show.

"Showing is the easy part for him," says Kay. "He spends all his efforts in fitting his heifers. He has a vision when he's at a show as to how he wants them to look."

Matt's favorite moment in the showing was during his second year of showing. "My cousin Seth and I won champion and reserve at our state show," he recalls. "We knew it was in our blood then."

Matt's dedication to his cattle does not go unnoticed. "Matt was selected as a herdsman finalist because of his willingness to get along with others, help younger members and also learn from others," says Dale Kottkamp, a National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) advisor and member of the herdsman finalist selection committee.

A born leader

McCurdy is also no stranger to leadership positions. He was elected to the NJHA board of directors in 2003. He has served as treasurer and vice president on the board.

"Matt is a natural-born leader," says Wade Perks, past NJHA president. "He is humble, but knows how to work hard and be dedicated. He's such a great friend and cattleman."

Perks also comments about Matt's knowledge of the Hereford breed. "This guy has a memory like a steel trap," Perks explains. "He knows every pedigree in the Hereford breed."

His mom agrees, "Matt can name pedigrees from 25 years ago. He studies the (old) *Polled Hereford World* and the *Hereford World* to stay on top of things."

Matt's involvement on the board has also sparked interest in Krissi to run in the future. "After watching him with all the juniors and his ability to relate to them, I want to run for the board," she says.

Matt doesn't just give on the national level; he also gives back to his state. He has served as the Georgia Polled Hereford Association president and as a director.

"Matt is one of those great people who knows how to separate his priorities. He's served on the board and still has success in showing cattle," Kottkamp says.

A living testament

Matt's family and friends all agree that he is a living testament of what a true herdsman is.

"He is someone I've always looked up to," says Krissi. "And I think I can speak for everyone in that he can be a role model for any Hereford youth. He just loves the Hereford breed so much."

Krissi also has a lot of great memories with Matt at home working

with the cattle. "Every night this summer has been especially hard because I know it's his last year, but they are always special because of the bond we share," she says.

Matt says he believes there are several characteristics that great herdsman possess. "They are someone who is hard working, honest and knowledgeable not only about the breed, but also the whole cattle industry," he says.

Matt has some advice for young junior members looking to become leaders in the Hereford breed. "Get involved in everything you can, participate in all the contests, go to PRIDE (Program for Reaching



Matt enjoys the celebration with his family after being named the 2006 Herdsman of the Year.

Individuals Determined to Excel)," he says. "There are so many opportunities out there that young members need to take hold of."

Matt lives up to his expectations as a good herdsman and knows it comes from being around family members who serve as his mentors.

"I couldn't do this without my family. They've been there through it all, and they are the ones I've learned so much from," Matt says. "I may not know what I want to do in the future, but I know Herefords will always be a part of it." **HW**