

Concentrating on Our Future

Deana Jak Farms is committed to youth.

by *Sara Weller*

When you pull into the drive at Deana Jak Farms in New Enterprise, Pa., you will see purebred Hereford cattle that are in perfect condition, well-kept fences, grass and barns. What you won't see is a bunch of hired hands doing all the work. Owners Doug and Jenny Howe are in the business of raising the best cattle possible while they raise the best children possible. So when it comes to taking care of things, all six children are expected to pitch in, even 6-year-old Kaia.

Deana Jak Farms' motto is "concentrating on our future, committed to this industry's strongest asset — the children." But for this family operation it is more than just a slogan to help them sell cattle: these are the words they live by.

More than just a name

In fact, the name "Deana Jak" is a combination of every family member's first initial of his or her first name. The boys' names are



Aleesha's heifer, Sage, stops for a snack while Kaia practices leading her.

first — the father, **Doug**; then **Ethan**, 9; **Austin**, 16; **Nigel**, 11; and **Andre**, 14. Then the second word is from the girls' names — first their mother, **Jenny**; then **Aleesha**, 12; and **Kaia**, 6. "We just kept trying different ways to put them together until we came up with Deana Jak," Jenny explains.

The Howes haven't always been in the cattle business though. Doug is one of 13 children raised by missionary parents in northern Ontario, Canada. After returning to the U.S., his parents worked on an Angus cow-calf operation of about 350 head, where Doug helped with all aspects from haying to

calving. But after graduation, he went to college and studied aviation management. He worked through college at a construction company and made what turned out to be valuable contacts. After college he worked as a corporate pilot, flying a Lear jet around the country. That's when he ran into a friend from his construction days who wanted him to get back into the business. He did, and everything snowballed from there.

Doug says when he first graduated from college, he and Jenny were just getting by. Then once they started having children, he says, "we made the decision for Jenny to stay home with the kids, and I basically had to pull myself up by the bootstraps." And that is exactly what he did.

"Everything we have we've worked for," Jenny says.

Once the Howes got started, they diversified their business. Now, as Doug describes, they own a construction development company that specializes in commercial and industrial projects throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. They also own a commercial coatings manufacturing company that compliments their construction company and are contemplating getting into the restaurant business.

But several years ago, even though their professional lives were



The Howe children stop work for a picture with three of their show cattle (l to r): Andre, Kaia, Aleesha, Ethan, Nigel and Austin.

going well, personally, they hit a hard place. They experienced some rough times with deaths in the family and other hardships. It was at this point when, Doug says, he knew he had to do something different.

After all this happened, he says with tears in his eyes, "I sat down with my business lawyer, my estate lawyer and my financial advisor and told them I was buying a farm." He says they told him he was crazy, but he responded, "I don't care what you think about it, I want to have time with my kids." And again, he did.

Why Herefords?

"Eight years ago we bought our first Hereford heifer for Austin," Doug says. "Next thing you know we had 20 at home."

They chose Herefords at first because of their disposition. "It gives the kids a lot more confidence because they are more approachable," Jenny says.

"The gentleness of Herefords attracted us to them," Doug says. "Then, as we get more and more into it, we see benefits from the data."

The Howes' home is halfway between Lancaster and Philadelphia in Wagontown, Pa., where they kept all their cattle at first and where they still keep the kids' show cattle.

Then about two years ago, they decided to buy the current property in New Enterprise. Doug says they needed to satisfy a tax exchange along with a friend, so they bought it together and split it in two. Then they leased their friend's part of the purchase, 165 acres, and added that to their 196.

Family operation

Because the farm is about two and a half hour's drive from their home, they needed to find someone they could trust to live on the place and look after everything. "The biggest thing that is important for us was getting a good herdsman. We wanted a cattle person with AI (artificial insemination) and embryo transfer (ET) skills," Doug says. They found that person in Leon (Chip) Tice II, who is their farm manager. Doug and Jenny describe him as a real cattleman with whom they share similar cattle

taste. His wife, Debbie, also helps on the farm.

Chip and Doug work together on many of the management decisions for the 82 registered Hereford cows, 25 registered Angus cows, 23 commercial cows and 20 registered Simmental cows. The Simmental cows belong to Chip. Because of Chip's background in AI and ET programs, he handles all their reproductive procedures himself. "Chip is on it," Jenny says. "He knows these cattle inside and out."

He has good facilities to use. The farm is an old dairy cattle operation, so there are 72,000 sq. feet of barns, which are at least 60 feet by 200 feet or bigger, and eight silos with three automatic bunk feeders.

For such a new operation, Deana Jak has seen great success in the sale ring. The Howes market purebred and black-baldie steer calves for junior projects. Cows, heifers and bulls are sold through private treaty and consignment sales. Doug says he is talking with American Hereford Association (AHA) fieldman John Meets about selling some of their steers into the Certified Hereford Beef® program this fall. They have a sale in conjunction with Boyd Beef Cattle, Mays Lick, Ky., and other selected consignors Labor Day weekend at Boyd's. They will also be consigning to Maryland Hereford's fall sale.

Showing success

Deana Jak's cattle have also had great success in the showing. When you walk into the office at the farm, the walls are covered with awards won by its cattle. At the 2007 Pennsylvania Farm Show, the Howes won every division they entered and, in some divisions, had reserve champion, as well. The family's proudest moment was having Austin and Andre win grand and reserve champion female in that show. Another highlight was at the Canada Western Agribition, Regina, Saskatchewan, where the Howe's cow-calf pair won grand champion female and was just points away from winning supreme champion at that show.

Still, the goal of the operation, Doug says, is to combine high-

quality production and success in the showing. "We want to win in the showing and have good numbers, then keep them as cows and breed more winners," Doug says. And so far they have been successful with that philosophy.

And just another example of how they keep the focus on the kids is their logo with a cow and calf that is a picture taken by Aleesha of Paprika, a bottle baby she raised and showed, along with her first calf.

The Howe children help choose which calf they want to show, but Doug and Jenny try to have the kids show in different classes so they don't compete against one another. "We are working so everyone has something bred and owned to show," Jenny says.

Accomplishing it all

The kids show all of the cattle; Austin even showed their bull, Reliant. Jenny home schools all six of the children, so they bring their show calves to the house near Philadelphia to work with them. "We feed them, halter

continued on page 22..

This sign at the driveway of the Howes' New Enterprise farm welcomes visitors. It features the logo made from the picture that Aleesha took of her cow, Paprika, and her first calf.





Kaia gets instruction from Austin while working with Sage.

them and tie them up so we can see them out the window while we are doing schoolwork,” Jenny says. “So they can accomplish it all without missing a thing.”

As their teacher, Jenny says she believes showing cattle is a learning experience, as well. She allowed time off from schoolwork for the family to make the trip to the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Jenny says, “The kids are exposing themselves to something new. It is a valuable education going to the shows.” Also just working with the cattle is good, she says. “It is a great learning experience when they can control something that is so much bigger than them.”

Jenny and Doug agree that the children have learned much from

showing cattle. “I look at it as public speaking, getting up in front of people, and they are a little more out of control because they have an animal that needs to be on display,” Jenny says.

Doug adds, “It is a lot of responsibility when you show because if your calf acts up it makes you look bad. It helps them to see they must work with the animals and what you put into it is what you are going to get out of it.”

Because the whole family is involved, they must work as a team to get so many cattle ready to show. They all say that everyone works together. Aleesha says that everyone has his or her job when they get to the show; however, Kaia adds she enjoys taking naps on the cows.

Jenny reiterates, though, that a team effort is the way they get things done.

Doug says, “It’s encouraging when people tell us we have a well-oiled machine.”

Even though the kids are hard at work most of the time, they say they enjoy it. “I like everything about it, the experience and meeting people,” Austin says.

Aleesha, who serves as the Pennsylvania Junior Hereford Association (PJHA) vice president, says attending shows is a great way to see her friends. “I only see my friends about two times a month at cattle shows,” she says.

The Howes are involved in more than just showing. They recently hosted a field day for the

Pennsylvania Hereford Association. The field day featured catered meals, speakers and a preview show for youth. “We wanted to set the bar,” Jenny says, “and make it a memorable event so people will want to come back.”

They decided to combine the preview show with the field day to allow the youth to show their cattle while older Hereford members would be there to watch.

“We had a wonderful day, where both the young and older members of the various Hereford associations shared a learning experience at all levels from ultrasound technology in pregnancies and data collection to just having a good time at a junior preview show with plenty of food, fellowship and Hereford cattle,” Doug says.

The Howe family’s goal for their Hereford operation is, in part, to bring Hereford people back to the East, Jenny says. Mainly though, they want to continue to produce the best cattle they can and to give their children and other children every opportunity to succeed.

Helping Hereford youth

The Howes are working to accomplish that goal by helping Hereford youth. They organized a way for any Pennsylvania youth interested in going to JNHE in Denver this year to go. Deana Jak Farms provided the fuel; the Ley Family of Far Away Farms, Glenmoore, Pa., supplied a truck; and Denny Stockdale of Stockdale Farms, Dayton, Pa., donated the trailer to haul the cattle. Also, at Deana Jak Farms’ field day, local youth were allowed to pick out show calves for a very reasonable price. In addition, the Howes support junior programs through donations. When asked why they give, Doug says, “We’re committed to children, not only our children but everyone’s.”

Doug says it is important to always remember where you came from. “I have always believed in remembering the bumps in life that make you who you are and the people who have helped you out,” he says. So even though Deana Jak Farms has seen success in the sale ring and showing, Doug and Jenny remember a time not that long ago when they had to pull their bootstraps hard to get where they are today. This experience is the reason why Doug says he feels it is so important to give his children and other Hereford youth every opportunity to succeed. **HW**



The Howe family celebrated Nigel’s success as polled division III reserve champion owned female.