

Ambassador

Jackson Alexander is a young Hereford enthusiast and beef industry advocate.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



Jackson first got involved in the beef industry through showing. "I have been showing cattle since I was 7 years old," Jackson says. He didn't start out small though, as his first show was the Oklahoma State Fair in 1998 with the first of many Hereford heifers in the halter. He's been showing ever since.

Farm boy

Raised on his family's farm near the small town of Anadarko in southwest Oklahoma, Jackson gained a valuable appreciation for not only the cattle industry but also the hard work it takes to be a part of it. His family's farm quickly became a Hereford operation after that first Hereford heifer in 1998. "We got into the Hereford industry because my older cousin showed Herefords, and I wanted to do the same thing," Jackson says. "Agriculture has played a deep role in our family."

Showing Herefords has always been a fun family activity, Jackson says. "I have attended the Junior National Hereford Expo in Chadron, Neb.; Indianapolis; Tulsa, Okla.; and Tunica, Miss. I've also attended regional Hereford shows in Tunica; Stillwater, Okla.; and Hutchinson, Kan.," Jackson explains.

He's been successful in the showing as well. "My biggest accomplishments in the showing were in 2007, when I had reserve champion female in the junior show at the National Western; champion Hereford heifer at the Kansas State Fair, Tulsa State Fair and Oklahoma State Fair; a division champion at the American Royal; and champion Hereford female at the Oklahoma Youth Expo. That same year, I was named the

Oklahoma Junior Cattlemen's Association 2007 All-Around Junior Cattleman of the Year."

A leader in the making

Busy seems inadequate to describe Jackson, as he not only participates in many organizations and activities but also is or was an officer in most. At Anadarko High School, he was senior class president, National Honor Society president, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) officer and state officer, and FFA officer. He also earned his State FFA degree. In addition to showing his Herefords, he's been a leader in livestock organizations as well. He served three times as president of his 4-H club, two times as an officer for the Oklahoma Club Calf Association and three times as an officer for the Junior Hereford Association of Oklahoma.

But, he didn't necessarily want to end his leadership at the state and local levels. He decided to earn his Master's of Beef Advocacy (MBA) degree to help him become a better advocate for the industry. The MBA program is funded through National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) with beef checkoff dollars to help producers gain the knowledge to speak out on behalf of the industry.

"I encourage all American farmers and ranchers to get involved in this program, and it is free to anyone who wants to participate," Jackson says. The program really opened his eyes to the opportunities to be a spokesperson for beef producers everywhere.

During summer 2009, he competed in multiple levels of competitions throughout Oklahoma, earning him the chance

*I*n a volatile time for the beef industry with sucker punches coming from all directions, it's refreshing to see young people enthusiastic about being advocates for beef producers everywhere. Jackson Alexander is one such young person. A lifelong Hereford enthusiast, he's finding his stride in the bigger realm of things as one of the five 2010 National Beef Ambassadors.



Jackson at one of his first Hereford shows in Chadron, Neb., in 1999.

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to compete at the National Beef Ambassador competition. “I realized that this experience would allow me a deeper insight into the American beef industry and American agriculture,” Jackson says.

So in October 2009, he traveled to Ft. Smith, Ark., for the National Beef Ambassador competition, organized through the American National Cattlemen and NCBA. He was one of five chosen for the coveted title of National Beef Ambassador from about 20 competitors ranging in age from 17 to 21. Most were college students; he was one of only two high school seniors in the competition.

He came prepared. Jackson explains, “Before the competition, each competitor was required to complete an in-depth portfolio documenting their activities since winning their respective state competitions. Each state ambassador is responsible for completing and documenting a number of consumer promotions, classroom presentations, and demonstrations prior to the national competition.”

During the national competition, each individual must prove his or her proficiency in these categories: consumer promotion, media interviews, portfolio evaluation and issues response.

Industry advocate

As part of the national team, Jackson will travel thousands of miles throughout the year being an advocate for America’s farmers and ranchers. “A major role is dispelling many of the myths

and rumors that are placed upon our industry,” Jackson says. “We work to be consumer educators to those who may not be as familiar with American beef. Our energy goes into a variety of areas including consumer promotion, classroom demonstration and presentation, along with social media outreach.”

Social networking is the fastest and easiest way to reach young adults, so the National Beef Ambassadors have a group Facebook page, as well as personal ones, Twitter accounts and a blog at www.beefambassador.com.

Jackson has traveled to the Pennsylvania Farm Show, Certified Angus Beef training in Wooster, Ohio, the Boston Marathon and the NCBA’s Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio, in addition to many venues in Oklahoma. He has also represented the beef industry at the Food and Wine Festival in Washington, D.C., New York City Bike Tour, New York and



Jackson says one of his biggest showring accomplishments was winning reserve champion Hereford female at the 2007 National Western junior show.



Jackson Alexander (second from right) is one of five members of the 2010 National Beef Ambassador team.

Wisconsin State Fairs, NCBA summer convention in Denver and the NCBA legislative session in Washington, D.C. One of the five ambassadors will be chosen to apply for a summer internship with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., for the summer of 2011.

Who knows what 2011 will bring for Jackson, and he is a little busy to dwell on it right now. He graduated third in his class of 119 in May from Anadarko High School and was the speaker of distinguished academic excellence during the commencement. He just started his undergraduate education at Oklahoma State University (OSU), majoring in agricultural communications with a minor in political science. He would like to be active in OSU’s student government and pursue a law degree after graduation.

“I’d like to work as an advocate for agriculture on the local, state and national level,” he says. “Hopefully, I will be able to work as a legislative activist or with the USDA to promote American agriculture.”

It sounds like he’s well on his way. **HW**