

Hereford Youth Shine in Indy



Jack Ward

It has been just a few weeks since the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), but I can still feel the excitement each time I think about the event. It was an event.

Kudos need to go out to a lot of folks including everyone involved from the state of Indiana, the corporate sponsors (John Deere and VitaFerm®), everyone who helped financially or supported the show in other ways, American Hereford Association (AHA) staff, the junior board and candidates, and, most importantly, every parent, grandparent, neighbor and friend who helped gather more than 1,000 head of Hereford cattle and nearly 650 exhibitors from 40 plus states and Canada. Amazing and congratulations!

If you were there, you understand; and if you were not, it was a real sight to see. If you haven't been able to take a look at some of the YouTube videos of the show, I would suggest you make your way to the Hereford Web site and take a look.

It starts at the top with our Junior Activities Director Amy Cowan and blossoms from there. The JNHE week starts with 6:30 a.m. meetings and finishes late in the evenings.

As the father of two teenage sons, I understand the importance of these programs and what they mean to the development and growth of our kids. As I write this column, my sons are attending a leadership conference similar to the Program for Reaching Individuals Determined to Excel (PRIDE) Convention

that Hereford youth have just attended.

These kinds of events will prepare our kids to become good, productive citizens in a country that is built from choices and opportunities. I am not a political activist, and I have always believed that whatever government was leading this country at any given time, even if I did not agree with its policies, its leaders would not ever be able to take away the freedoms that U.S. citizens enjoy. Even though this is still true, I would tell you that I feel a little nervous about the future of the U.S. livestock industry. As a breed and an industry, we need to start setting aside differences to come together as a whole.

I was a very proud father a couple of years ago when I heard about my son making a statement at a leadership event he was attending. He simply stood up and asked the question, "Why can't all livestock and farming groups join together as one voice to speak on behalf of the farming and ranching community?"

This is a simple question that would seem to have a simple answer, but I see us all trying to pull in different directions. Let's understand what lies ahead for our industry. The world population is growing, the amount of land that is being taken out of production is increasing and our cow numbers are shrinking. There are several issues that are driving these changes, but we need to understand that as an industry we are going to be challenged to make

the necessary changes in agriculture to produce a safe and affordable food supply with fewer resources.

It is not about species, breeds, corn, soybeans, or fruit and vegetables; it is about an industry and educating a growing population that is getting more disconnected from the agriculture sector on a daily basis. I am fortunate, because I have been able to sustain a good standard of living for my family by doing what I love to do in an industry that I love and in an industry that has such an enormous responsibility. I would like for my sons and your children to have that same opportunity. Will we see all 600-plus JNHE exhibitors come back to this industry? Of course not, but remember that they will always be the advocates and voices for our industry for the years to come.

Finally, there were several proud moments at the JNHE, but I was so proud of the Hereford family as they honored a young man who lost his battle with cancer just prior to the show. Chris Cummings had a wish, and that wish was to have a herd of Hereford cattle. I was at the Hoosier Beef Congress the evening he got to show his Hereford steer that had been given to him by the Make a Wish foundation.

It was a great moment, and it was certainly touching to see Hereford breeders give Chris and his family a standing ovation as his Hereford steer was paraded just prior to his class being led into the ring. This is just another reminder of how precious our time on this earth can be. **HW**