

A Herdsman's Helping Hands



A strong work ethic and a desire to help others led to Jason May being honored as the 2015 Herdsman of the Year.

by **Bridget Beran**

The journey to the Hereford breed wasn't exactly a straight line for Jason May, Randolph, Minn. He grew up with older siblings who showed dairy cattle. When his family got their first Hereford in 1994 — an \$800 heifer named Susie, whom they had until she was 16 years — Jason knew that taking care of cattle was going to be a part of his life.

"It started when I was 7 years old and my older brothers and sisters were showing cattle," says Jason. "I was the one staying at home taking care of them and watching them all day long. I just knew that's what I wanted to do."

That love of caring for cattle came full circle for Jason at the 2015 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) when his peers elected him Herdsman of the Year. It was not a surprising honor according to his friend and fellow Hereford enthusiast Tony Marthaler, who says Jason doesn't know a stranger.

"He's the guy that knows everybody in the barn and will stop and talk to everyone," Tony says. "He's really outgoing and willing to help anybody with anything, even if he doesn't know you. He's very friendly and always tries to be helpful."

Tony would know better than most because

he's been traveling with Jason since Jason's first JNHE. They grew up just 15 miles down the road from each other and showed together in 4-H and FFA. In 2009, Jason had a heifer he wanted to take to JNHE. Jason's parents, Mark and Ann May, asked Tony to go with Jason, partially to keep an eye on him but mostly because Jason wasn't even old enough to drive. It was at this first JNHE when Jason became hooked on the Hereford breed.

Finding a family

"I love the people and the connections that you make," Jason says. "You really make a family within the breed. We didn't go with our family and people would take care of us or give us a meal or check up on us. It made the breed stand out to me like nothing else. The people are so caring and honest and would help you with whatever you need."

The Hereford family has kept him coming back every year since and even inspired him to run for the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board of directors in 2012. His involvement in the breed was always centered on the cattle and the people.

"I love getting to sit in the barn at JNHE, talking to old friends and meeting new ones," Jason says. "I've also enjoyed getting to travel to as many places as I have. I've been to 35 states and I'm just 22 years old."

Making connections is one of the things he encourages young cattlemen to do as well, saying juniors should surround themselves with good people and know that the connections they make will affect them more than they could ever imagine. This is certainly true in Jason's life. He cites John and Melody McCurry, Burrton, Kan., as some of his greatest role models and mentors. He worked for the McCurry family while he was attending Hutchinson Community College, where he was a part of the livestock judging team. He also interned for the McCurrys during the summer of 2013.

"His work ethic is admirable," John



Presenting Jason May with the Herdsman of the Year award was the 2014 Herdsman, Cody Beck, Bainbridge, Ind.

says. “He’s always looking ahead to what needs to be done, instead of always having to be told what to do. He has a desire to succeed and is constantly setting a goal, working hard until he gets there and then setting another one. He’s a nonstop goer. He’s a great kid and doesn’t know a stranger. He wants to give back to the younger kids in agriculture as much as anybody his age.”

Being able to give back to juniors was something that became increasingly important to Jason as he got older and involved in the board. Jackson Neil, Northfield, Minn., grew up five miles down the road from Jason and credits him for helping to get him involved in the NJHA.

“He’s helped me as a mentor, helping me get better as a fitter, as well as being my friend,” Jackson says. “He is someone that is always willing to help anybody, you just have to ask him. He’s very involved in the Hereford breed and he enjoys helping younger people and getting them to learn more.”

Value of dedication

For Jason, dedication is central to the advice he gives future cattlemen. While he says that he didn’t always have the best cattle, there wasn’t going to be anyone who outworked him.

“It takes the hours and the time,” Jason explains. “It doesn’t just come, you’ve got to be willing to spend the hours in the barn. Don’t give up when you’re last in class. I’ve been there, and I’ve seen it. We fought to not be last in class a lot of times. Let it push you to work harder for the next year.”

Jason is known for his work ethic, pushing himself to be better and to work harder for many years.

“He’s been working his butt off for the last seven years and became a board member and kept trying to go up and up and up in the industry,” Tony says. “He’s made a lot of relationships with people and he’s trying to get into the top of the industry. He’s become a lot

“In my life at the moment, I have two major goals: to win junior herdsman and senior herdsman. ... So I’m halfway there.”

— Jason May



more responsible and self-reliant. He’s always working on his own, learned a lot of prioritizing and time-management. He’s developed social skills. He used to just be a little 15-year-old kid running around the fair and now he’s working with some of the biggest producers in the industry. I’m really proud of him and I’m glad I could be along for the ride.”

This summer, Jason worked for Fawcett’s Elm Creek Ranch, Ree Heights, S.D., where he plans to return after graduating from South Dakota State University in December.

He says long-term he hopes to have his own operation to sell cattle to juniors to show, though that plan is still a while into the future. For now, he wants to help as many juniors have a good experience as possible and to show them the same opportunities that he received during his time in the NJHA.

Working at Fawcett’s has been a perfect fit for Jason, and he cites Daniel Fawcett, 2014 American Hereford Association (AHA) Hereford Herdsman of the Year, as one of his role models.



As a member of the National Junior Hereford Association board of directors, Jason emceed opening ceremonies at the Junior National Hereford Expo.

Herdsman candidates

Congratulations to these Herdsman of the Year finalists:



Joel Butler

Joel Butler is the 22-year-old son of Jimmy and Andrea Butler. A native of Republic, Mo., Joel will graduate from Missouri State University in December and will return to complete his master's degree. He has competed successfully on the national level in the showing, including exhibiting the national champion bull at the 2012 American Royal, as well as many division champions at other national shows. Joel has also been named a top 10 showman at several Junior National Hereford Expos (JNHE). He credits Kyle and Drew Perez, Cody and Dereck Washam, and Gary Buchholz, as well as his father, for mentoring him in the cattle industry.

Matt Johnson, Cambridge, Ill., is the 21-year-old son of Royce and Kathy Johnson. Matt will be a senior at the University of Illinois. He has been exhibiting Hereford cattle for 14 years. In 2015 he exhibited the reserve grand bred-and-owned heifer at the Illinois preview show. He lists making the top 10 senior showmen at the 2012, 2013 and 2015 JNHEs as his proudest accomplishments, as well as showing the reserve champion polled heifer at the 2012 Illinois State Fair. Matt says both of his parents are his role models and his mentors. Matt was the champion senior showman at the 2015 JNHE.

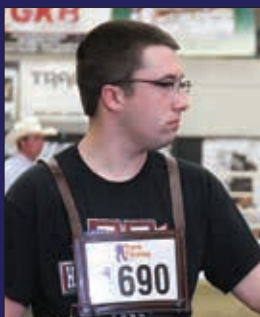


Matt Johnson

Austin Matheny is the 19-year-old son of Andrew and Suzanne Matheny. A native of Mays Lick, Ky., Austin will be a sophomore at Kansas State University this fall. He has been showing Hereford cattle for 12 years and this was his ninth JNHE. Austin was the recipient of the 2014 Bluegrass and Buckeye scholarship. Austin noted winning an owned class with a bred-and-owned heifer at the last JNHE and bringing her back to exhibit this year as one of his proudest accomplishments. He was named champion senior showman at the Kentucky preview show and was the 2006 champion peewee showman at JNHE. Austin says his father, along with Charlie Boyd Sr. and Dennis Birdsall, have served as his mentors over the years.



Austin Matheny



Harrison McMahon

Harrison McMahon, Ayr, Neb., is the 21-year-old son of Brian and Jill McMahon. He graduated from the John Deere program in applied sciences in 2014. A third-generation Hereford breeder, Harrison and his family had three class winners in a row at the 2013 JNHE. He has been showing Herefords for 14 years and was a top 10 senior showmanship finalist in 2015. Harrison cites his dad and his brother Grady as his mentors and role models. **HW**

"When I started working for them and seeing the passion this family has for this breed and the industry, it was an easy decision to come here," Jason says. "It's a good place to be and to start off to make a name for myself. They're caring people who are down to earth and will respect you as much as you respect them."

John McCurry says that Jason's exposure to larger operations, like his and Fawcett's Elm Creek Ranch, has been beneficial in giving Jason a broader perspective on the business.

Jason says, "I'll always remember Shane Bedwell's speech at JNHE about turning a cow into a show heifer, instead of turning a show heifer into a cow. I learned at Fawcett's that maybe 10% of the herd is bred to be show cows. The industry revolves around cows, not show cows. You have to consider how she's going to work, not how she's going to win. It's a lot easier to turn a good female into a show heifer."

These lessons will be especially helpful now that his junior career is over and he transitions into AHA membership. However, Jason says he'll remember his youth career fondly though the end was bittersweet.

"It was tough knowing that it was all over," Jason says. "It was hard to really realize it until the final day. It brought back a lot of memories, both good times and bad. Having my whole family there for the first time was really cool though, so I could experience the last junior show our family will have together."

Though it may be the end of the road, Jason certainly went out on a high note, achieving a lofty goal.

"It means an awful lot to me," Jason says. "In my life at the moment, I have two major goals: to win junior herdsman and senior herdsman. You know you've accomplished a lot and people respect you and have noticed how much time and effort you've put in to the work you do. So I'm halfway there." **HW**