



STRONG FOUNDATION

CHB LLC President Wayne Mrnak helps create a foundation for CHB to build on for years to come.

by *Angie Stump Denton*

Committed to doing what's right for the breed, Wayne Mrnak, Bowman, N.D., leads the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC board with integrity and dedication. With those same qualities Wayne and his brother Terry manage the family's Mrnak Hereford Ranch.

Ranching has been Wayne's passion since he was a young boy. He attended North Dakota State University for one year before returning to the ranch to do what he loved the most — raising Hereford cattle.

"Wayne understands very well the challenges commercial producers face when they try to market their cattle," explains Rob Ames, CHB LLC executive vice president. "He can speak from the perspective of a seedstock producer, commercial producer and backgrounder, and he has credibility."

Ranch history

In 1906 Wayne's great-grandfather Vincent Mrnak homesteaded the land where the Mrnak family ranches today near Bowman. The first registered Hereford heifers were purchased in 1945 by Wayne's grandfather Wencil for Jim, Wayne's dad. Those heifers were the foundation and beginning of Mrnak Hereford Ranch. Since 1968 the entire registered cow herd has consisted of Herefords.

Currently Mrnak Hereford Ranch is a partnership between Wayne and Terry. Their parents, Jim and Marlene, still live on the ranch and are "semi-retired," Wayne says. Terry and Debby's son Brent has come back to the ranch to help as well. He oversees the family's backgrounding lot.

The ranch consists of 500 cows, mostly all registered Herefords. The brothers do manage a few black and black baldie cows that are used as recipients for their embryo transfer (ET) program. The cow herd is mostly Canadian Mark Donald and Line 1 genetics.

Wayne says the family's breeding program is based on moderate birth weight and producing high-performance bulls with maternal strength. Mrnaks sell mostly 2-year-old bulls in their annual sale the second Friday in February. The offering typically includes 80 bulls and 70 females. As a customer service the past two years they've invited their bull customers to consign black baldie yearling females to the sale.

The family markets its feeder steers and heifers through local auction markets. Four of the last five years the Mrnak steers have gone through the CHB program. The family's 2006 calf crop is enrolled in the Hereford Verified program.

Leadership roles

Wayne was elected to the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors in October 2003. He has served on the show and sale, breed improvement, and executive committees. Wayne has also served on the CHB board for three years.

"Wayne lives and breathes the Hereford business," says Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president. "He is actively involved in all facets



Wayne Mrnak and his wife, Jill, and their daughter, Robyn, live on the ranch that was homesteaded by Wayne's great-grandfather in 1906.

of production from engineering the product to farm management, custom feeding and customer relations, and finally the powerful tools and dynamics of beef marketing. This rounded knowledge has been a real asset for the CHB program. Wayne has a keen understanding of the business climate we're involved in."

Wayne says a good leader must be a good listener. "A good leader listens to the membership's wants and needs and is willing to make decisions based on those requests," He adds, "You can't make everybody happy, and above all you must do what's best for the breed."

Ames notes that Wayne's definition of a good leader is confirmed by his actions.

"Wayne is a purposeful listener," Ames says. "His style is to gather and weigh opinions before coming to a conclusion."

Huffhines agrees, "Wayne is a quiet leader who listens extremely well and takes his time to understand all of the information and inputs that go into decision making. Once he makes his opinion known, you can be confident that he thought of all of the angles and his input is always invaluable."

The following are Wayne's thoughts regarding CHB LLC and where the Hereford breed is heading in the future.

Q. What issues are facing the CHB LLC board?

A. First and foremost is tenderness. Currently CHB LLC is working with the University of Missouri on a tenderness research project. With this project we hope to prove there is a genetic trend for tenderness in the Hereford breed. This research will create more demand for Hereford beef in retail and food service.

Another issue is getting more cattle enrolled in Hereford Verified and continuing to build that program.

Food Service currently accounts for 9% of CHB marketing; as a CHB board we would like to see that grow to 20%. Building our food service market is one of the ways we can make Hereford a household name. We want the housewife to recognize "Hereford" when she goes to the grocery store and request Hereford beef.

We have picked up more retailers this past year compared to any other year, but losing the Big Y account has actually decreased total retail tonnage.

High beef prices have had an effect on the business, and it has been important that we balance premiums we seek for Hereford cattle while keeping the product competitive with other brands. Our packers have recognized this and have tried to be receptive to customer needs.



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Q. When you were elected to the CHB LLC board, what were your goals? How have they changed?

A. My goals have not changed since being elected to the board. They are to increase demand for Hereford beef and in return increase demand for Hereford seedstock. One example of this is the Hereford Verified program; it will create demand for Hereford seedstock as the program grows.

Q. How do you want people to remember you as the CHB LLC board president?

A. Hopefully when producers look back five to 10 years from now, people will say our board built a solid foundation to keep CHB LLC moving forward in a positive manner.

Q. What have been some of the biggest challenges you’ve faced as an AHA Board member?

A. The strategic planning meeting in April 2005 was one of the biggest challenges I’ve faced on the Board. Working to set goals for the future of the breed was both interesting and challenging.

Q. What do you consider to be the most important accomplishments the Association has achieved during your tenure?

A. The most important and what I’m most proud of are the \$profit indexes. I was on the committee that worked on developing the indexes and I believe the indexes will help the commercial sector. I’m also proud of the Strategic Plan that we developed in 2005. I believe the plan will be beneficial for years to come.

Q. What do we need to work on as a breed?

A. The breed needs to concentrate on two things: 1) Moderate birth weights; and 2) Improve carcass quality. The breed needs to have a higher percentage of cattle that grade Choice.

We constantly need to work at increasing quality and consistency. I think the Non-Certificate AI Sire program will be beneficial for the breed and help us achieve quality and consistency. Our hope as an AHA Board is that the program will encourage more artificial insemination (AI) use of proven sires.

Q. Of the programs offered by the Association, which do you think offers the most opportunity for members in the future?

A. Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) and the \$profit indexes are extremely important today. Commercial producers are asking questions about the indexes. The indexes are a snapshot — quick overview — of the traits you need for your program, depending on your target market.

Hereford Verified is also an important program as we look to the future. As we start to verify age and genetics of cattle, and are able to track feed and carcass data, we will be able to determine which bloodlines are superior. **HW**