



Mr. President

With keen business sense and Southern charm, John Woolfolk served as the 2011 American Hereford Association President.

by Angie Stump Denton

In 1963 a Tennessee boy purchased a registered Hereford heifer as a 4-H project. That purchase sparked a passion for the Hereford breed. Through the years, he gradually transitioned his family's commercial cow herd into a registered Hereford herd, and he became a true leader and a promoter of the Hereford breed.

Today, 48 years later, that young man — John Woolfolk — recently ended his year as president of the American Hereford Association (AHA).

“John has been an extraordinary leader for the AHA,” says Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president. “He has a depth of understanding of the entire beef industry due to his many decades of working as a livestock specialist for Tennessee Farm Bureau. He has been instrumental in organizing 13 years of special Hereford feeder calf sales, and he has a keen understanding of what drives markets.

“Most importantly, John is a very calm and stabilizing presence in the boardroom, and he encourages a dynamic exchange of ideas among board members and staff.”

Raised near Jackson, Tenn., John graduated from the University of Tennessee-Martin in 1971 and went on to Kansas State University, where he earned a master's degree. After graduating, he worked two years for Obion County Tennessee Ag Extension Service. He then spent 10 years on the farm full-time building his Hereford herd before going to work for the Tennessee Farm Bureau (TFB) as a regional fieldman.

He continued to live and work on the farm until 1996, when he was transferred to the state Farm Bureau office near Columbia. At that time, John's oldest son, Scott, had graduated from high school, so he remained at the farm and continued the day-to-day management.

For the last seven years, John has served as coordinator of Tennessee Beef Alliance. In this position, he manages TFB's heifer development program, bull lease program and feeder calf sales. Although he is not on the farm dealing with the cattle hands-on every day, his passion and

involvement with the breed has never been stronger.

His family

Spend five minutes with John, and there's no doubt he's a family man. John and his wife of 40 years, Pat, have three children — Scott, Amy and Matt.

Scott and his wife, Cher, have two boys, John Thomas and Russ. A day doesn't go by that John and Scott don't talk about the farm and cattle. Although he's two hours away, John continues to play an active role in the decision making on the farm.

Amy and her husband, Jeff Adkerson, have two girls, Emily and Lauren; they all live in Starkville, Miss.

Matt is currently a senior at Mississippi State.

Growing up, all three kids participated in junior Hereford activities. Amy served on the National Junior Polled Hereford Council from 1995-97 and was the National Polled Hereford Queen in 1997. Matt is currently serving as chairman of the National Junior Hereford Association. It's evident the Woolfolks are a family of Hereford leaders.

"Our kids didn't give us a choice to tell them they could not show," John says. "It was in their blood. We don't regret a penny we have spent. Showing cattle has been part of our lifestyle and is something we do as family.

"It has taught our kids to be respectful and develop good work ethic," John adds. "You see so many kids come into the workplace who don't want to work, and they don't have good work habits. It's hard to find a good employee. I believe the Hereford youth program teaches our youth the skills to be good employees."

John and Pat are proud of their children, but their faces really



The Woolfolk family (pictured, l to r): Matt, Cher, John Thomas, Scott, Russ, John, Pat, Emily, Jeff, Amy, Lauren and close family friend, Allysya Fee.

light up when they talk about their grandchildren. The next Woolfolk generation is becoming active in junior Hereford programs. John Thomas has been showing regionally and plans to attend the Junior National Hereford Expo next summer.

Woolfolk Farms

Established in 1865 by John's great-grandmother, Woolfolk Farms is a diversified family farm located in western Tennessee.

Before John purchased his 4-H project, the farm had commercial cows. His dad purchased some commercial Herefords in the 1950s. Today the Woolfolk herd includes 100 registered and 50 commercial Hereford cows.

In 2003 John and Scott started the commercial herd to meet the growing demand for baldie females. They would breed the Hereford cows to Angus or Balancer bulls and then develop the resulting offspring and sell them as bred replacements or calve the heifers out and sell each with a calf at side.

This year they changed the focus of the commercial program, and

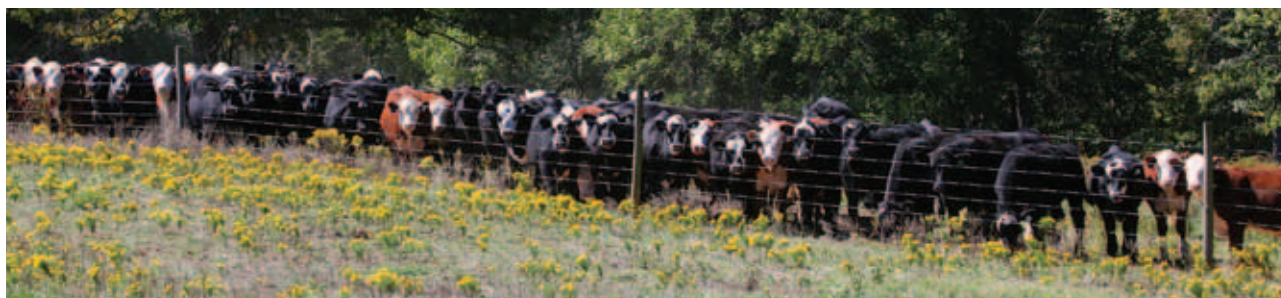
instead of producing baldies, they have used the commercial cows as recipients for their ET program. "This is the quickest way to increase the output of our registered herd," John says. "In the Southeast, we do not have enough Hereford bulls to meet demand."

Along with the cattle, Woolfolk Farms includes cotton, soybeans and hay production. The family also hosts hundreds of families each October at

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John and Matt are the first father and son to serve as president of the AHA and NJHA.



its Woolfolk Farms Marvelous Maze. Visitors have a chance to make their way through two corn mazes and two hay mazes, as well as enjoy a petting zoo and pick pumpkins. John says the maze, started in 2000, is a great opportunity for them to serve as agriculture ambassadors, sharing the ag story with those who have never been on a farm.

Breed leadership

Prior to joining the AHA Board, John served as president and secretary of the Tennessee Polled Hereford Association. He was instrumental in starting the Tennessee Hereford Marketing Program (THMP) in 1999.

“A group of us were upset that when we took a calf to the auction, we always got under the quoted mark for the week,” John says. “We were determined to get fair market price for our cattle.”

That goal has long been surpassed, as now the group has created an outstanding market where consignors earn a premium for their calves. In 2010 42 consignors sold 605 head of age-, source- and health-verified Hereford and Hereford-cross calves for approximately \$48.50 and \$53 more per head on average than the reported weekly average for steers and heifers respectively. The premium for steer calves increased about \$13 compared to the 2009 premium.

Beyond increasing market prices, the program has also led to

a relationship with Ford County Feeders and its manager, Danny Herrmann. This has helped improve the health program as well as get carcass data back on the calves.

The next step beyond the feedlot is that a percentage of the cattle would then go to a Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) processing plant and then into the distribution channels for CHB®. Sysco, one of the Southeast CHB suppliers, created table tents promoting CHB product and Hereford breeders and has placed those in restaurants where the product is sold.

“This has helped change the attitude about CHB among Southeast Hereford breeders,” John says. “This has allowed the program to come full circle — producers working together to sell groups of feeder cattle that are shipped to the feedlot and then packing plant and, finally, distributors. In theory some of our Southeast Hereford beef could be coming back to our tables.”

While on the AHA Board, John has served on the CHB LLC board for four years. He was also a member of the marketing and finance committees.

“Serving on the CHB board has been a learning experience,” John says. “It has been a challenging time for CHB, but it is exciting to see the growth trends this fiscal year. Sales are up, and we have shifted gears toward foodservice.”

John commends the CHB LLC staff for finding a solution to increase product sales. John had the chance to attend a Sysco training and witnessed 100 salesmen learn about CHB product. “I was in awe thinking about the impact these people could have on the streets selling our product,” he says.

Memorial Day weekend John also had the opportunity to travel to New York to represent CHB LLC at Fairway



The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* newspaper sponsored a contest called “Plant to Prosper” that was promoted by Ag Extension Service in Mid-South states in the 1950s. It was the 1950s version of “sustainable agriculture.” John explains the picture depicts how his family produced almost everything they consumed on the farm.

Market. The store invited customers to the store to meet the ranchers who produced CHB product.

During the two-day event, they gave away 1,750 samples and answered questions from the customers.

“They were very receptive to our story,” John says. “A large portion of the customers we talked to went ahead and purchased the product. It does increase sales and does move product.”

“It was interesting to me the No. 1 question was ‘Is it grass-fed beef?’,” he continues. “We would explain that for most of their lives, they were raised on grass with mothers. Then the last 100-plus days they were put on a forage and grain diet to enhance eating experience, flavor and tenderness of meat.”

John says he left New York convinced CHB and the entire agriculture industry needs to do more similar promotions. “We need to take time to go to the consumers and tell them our story,” he says.

To learn more about John’s thoughts as a Board member and AHA president, see “Q&A with AHA President Woolfolk.”

“It is an exciting time for our breed with a renewed interest in the ‘new Hereford’ that is driving demand higher than breeders have seen in recent years,” John says. “The AHA Board and staff are working hard to position the Hereford breed where it can effectively utilize proven technologies that are available in order to continually improve the status of the breed.” **HW**



Each year the THMP feeder calf sale is hosted at the Tennessee Livestock Producers’ (TLP) facility in Columbia. Pictured with John is Darrell Ailshie, TLP manager, who has helped make the program such a success.

Q & A with AHA President Woolfolk

Q: In 2010 the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board approved a new strategic plan, what are your thoughts on this new strategy? What are the top five tactics you hope the Board and staff continue to focus on?

A: With the strategic plan, we developed a road map for the next five years. It is a compilation of ideas from a good cross-section of the industry — large and small producers, purebred and commercial producers and different focuses.

It was a big undertaking and a great process; now staff and the Board need the time to implement.

The top five tactics I'd like to see continued focus on are:

- 1) Continue DNA genomic research with USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture), the consortium and universities.
- 2) Work on farm software systems that are compatible with AHA records program.
- 3) Expand marketing opportunities through social media.
- 4) Educate members and nonmembers about our services.
- 5) Increase National Junior Hereford Association membership by 20%.

I think the plan is an outstanding strategy that utilizes strengths of the breed to drive increase in Hereford demand. Along with that will come an increase in membership, registrations and transfers, and services.

Q: How would you summarize your tenure on the Board?

A: The last four years have simply been some of the best years of my life. I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute, especially the opportunity to attend Hereford events in 25 states. It has been a very educational, eye-opening and humbling experience.

As a Board member, you quickly develop an appreciation of how broad the Association is. There is a lot that goes on under the umbrella of AHA from finances, performance testing, maintaining records, monitoring genetic defects, managing shows, advertising, property sales and management, as well as youth and women programs.

Q: What have been some of the biggest challenges during your tenure?

A: When I was asked as a candidate what I thought would be a challenge in the next five years, I said "meeting demand." I know people at that time thought I was crazy. It has been exciting to see the demand change.

I think we can attribute the increase in demand to a combination of things including the heterosis research done with Harris Ranch and Circle A Ranch, the reporting of the research results, and our advertising campaign, which have all impacted demand. Just last week staff got a call from a lady from Kentucky who saw our national advertising campaign and called to see where she could get a bull like the one pictured in the ad. We are reaching new customers through our promotion efforts.

I think meeting the demand will continue to be a challenge for our breeders in the future — producing enough high-quality Hereford bulls to meet the demand in the commercial industry. If demand outpaces our ability to produce quality bulls, producers may consider keeping one more bull that should have been a steer, and that's not what's best for the breed.

Q: How do we continue to increase market share in the commercial industry?

A: This can be accomplished by continuing to spread the news about the value of Hereford genetics in the beef industry. Our practical, on-farm research at Harris and Circle A has done so much to entice producers to use Hereford bulls.

The average producer puts more credit into research results when he hears or sees a Mark Akin or John Lacey talking about the value of Hereford bulls and heterosis. Mark and John have given credibility to our message. We need to continue projects like Harris and Circle A and utilize those producers as spokesmen for Hereford.

As producers we must produce bulls that live up to or exceed the expectations of buyers. If we don't, we'll lose our new customers.

Q: When you were elected to the Board what were your goals for the Association? How has that changed?

A: Overall our goal has been to have a turnaround in direction of the numbers — registrations, transfers and increased demand in the commercial industry.

I also hoped to work to change the attitude of Hereford breeders. These goals have not changed, but I believe we've made progress. We have increased the acceptance and usage of Hereford genetics in the commercial industry, and I think Hereford breeders are excited, as sales are high. In my opinion the attitudes of our breeders have changed dramatically in four years.

I think we need to continue to focus on programs for the future. Our junior program is the best avenue to get new members and breeders. Youth are the long-term lifeblood of our Association.

The genomics area is something we need to keep on the forefront of our strategy. It is a new tool for breed improvement and will allow the Association to release enhanced EPDs (expected progeny differences). It is exciting for me to think that with the use of genomics when a calf is born, it can have accuracy of a yearling bull.

Q: What do you consider to be the most important accomplishment the Association has achieved during your tenure as a director and officer?

A: How we as a Board handled the genetic defect issue is one of the most rewarding accomplishments during my tenure. When I was elected, the Board was facing genetic defect issues and no one knew what was going to happen.

We were very fortunate that Jon Beever's research work allowed our breeders to have a tool to test for genetic defect carriers that would allow producers to breed around the defect without having to cull their entire herds. The issue was controversial for a short time, but as a breed we tackled the issue and have moved on. We have gone from that time to now implementing a strategy to test every future Hereford sire with registered offspring to identify any known genetic defects. That is tremendous progress. **HW**

