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Rancher Spotlight: Sonoma Mountain Herefords

If you ever find yourself up in the beautiful Sonoma wine country and come across a bunch of top-quality Herefords, you have probably just come across the Hereford cattle of Sonoma Mountain Herefords, Santa Rosa, Calif.

The Mickelson family of Jim, Marcia, Bobby and Jamie own and operate Sonoma Mountain Herefords, a family-run seedstock ranch that manages 200 registered cows in the picturesque Sonoma wine country. The heifers are sold through private treaty, and the bulls are sold through an annual bull sale each fall in October. The ranch has operated for more than 20 years on the same land.

Jim oversees the business and his and Marcia's son, Bobby, is the herdsman taking care of day-to-day operations. Their daughter, Jamie, is in charge of fitting the show string and maintains the ranch's website. In addition, Jamie has also begun a new venture with Sonoma Mountain Beef Company. She will be selling local branded beef, focusing on high-end retail accounts. Marcia is also in charge of recordkeeping.

Sonoma Mountain traces its lineage back to the famous Kunde Herefords that Marcia's father began raising in the 1940s. When the Mickelson children were growing up, they started showing steers, then heifers, and things took off from there. Jim and Marcia bought her parents' herd and began production co-owned with their children.

Marcia says, "Once you've raised Herefords in your 4-H and FFA project and you realize what a great breed of cattle they are, it's pretty hard to deviate into a secondary breed."

The Mickelsons love Herefords for a number of reasons: mothering ability, doability, efficiency, the longevity of their bulls, the carcass quality of offspring and docility. Their docility translates into better carcass quality due to their calm nature. Plus, Marcia states, "You don't have to batten down the hatches when one of the cows is calving and needs a bit of help."

However, ranching in California is no easy chore because ranchers are always worried about water and the

state government. "While already tough with lack of rain over the past three years, one more year of drought in this state and I'm not sure what position the government is going to take in seizing water rights," Marcia says.

However, Sonoma Mountain Herefords is always looking for ways to adapt. Whether it's different ways to feed, new genetics, using different management tools or embracing technology, the Mickelsons know producers have to stay abreast of what is going on to be successful — like pairing great tasting Hereford beef and wine.

The Mickelsons also operate a winery and vineyard and say the two diverse operations of cattle and wine are actually similar in nature. The cattle and grapes work hand in hand and make for not only sustainable agriculture but also quite the site for tourism. The Mickelsons differentiate by telling their authentic story that helps to sell their brand and allows them to stand out in the wine and beef industries.

Their biggest enjoyment is the lifestyle that Hereford cattle have given them and their children. Marcia says the best way to relieve stress is to drive through the pasture of momma cows and their calves. "That is certain to put a smile on our faces," she says. "The people that we have met and the friends we have made through the Hereford industry are quite treasured."

Stop by and visit with them if you find yourself up in Sonoma wine country, or you can find them at SonomaMountainHerefords.com. **HW**

