

Third Generation Leader



2016 AHA President Sam Shaw continues a family legacy by leading the Association.

by *Julie Mais*

Some may never be so fortunate to realize their lifelong career at the age of 2, but for as long as he could remember, Idaho Hereford breeder Sam Shaw knew he wanted to continue the legacy his father and grandfather had set before him — raising Hereford cattle and giving back to the breed.

Sam is the third generation of Shaws to not only be involved in the purebred Hereford industry but to serve as president of the American Hereford Association (AHA).

“This very fact is an indication of what the Hereford breed has done for our family,” Sam says. “It’s important for us to give back because this breed has given us a lot of opportunity.”

The ranch

The Shaw family’s Hereford herd began in 1946 when Sam’s grandpa, Tom, was given a belated graduation gift from a neighbor — a Hereford heifer. In 1959 Tom and his wife, Mary, purchased a piece of land near Caldwell, Idaho, which is where the family resides today. Tom and Mary’s son, Greg, officially joined the family business in 1969, and he and his wife, Cleo, formed Shaw Cattle Co.

Their son, Sam, made the decision as a young boy that he wanted to work on the ranch alongside his family. “By the time I was 2 or 3 years old, I knew this is what I wanted to do. Of course I don’t remember being that young,” Sam laughs, “but my parents comment on how I always wanted to go with dad and be with him on the ranch.”

As Sam grew up, he continued to enjoy being around cattle and became involved in the junior horned Hereford program.

Though Sam’s mind was made up to join the family business, Greg and Cleo told Sam after high school graduation he had to attend college or join the military before he would be allowed to come back to the ranch. “So that’s really the only reason I went to the University of Idaho,” Sam says. “I would have rather been home working cattle because it’s always been my passion. But I’m glad I went, even though I spent a lot of time driving back and forth.”

Today, the ranch maintains more than 1,500 registered cows encompassing Hereford, Angus and Red Angus breeds.

Though the operation has grown, Shaw Cattle Co. remains customer-service driven — a focus started by



Sam's grandpa. "We have customers that have bought bulls from us for three or four generations," Sam says. "Some people we sell to aren't just customers anymore, they are more like our family and friends. They are our customers, but really it's more of a relationship. That's what sets us apart — our family selling bulls that will help other families be profitable."

Shaw Cattle Co. calves in spring and fall to expand its market and cater to its customers by offering bulls in two age groups. Each February the ranch markets 450 bulls at a sale hosted on the ranch.

The ranch is located on 3,000 irrigated acres, where the Shaws own 1,500 acres and lease the other half in the area. Sam says they are fortunate to have mild winters, and, thanks to irrigation, they are able to economically keep their females in good condition.

"The expensive part is growing that grass," Sam says. "Everything is irrigated because precipitation averages only 10-12 inches a year. We have three big reservoirs that collect snow pack from mountains that irrigate the valley. Without the water we would have nothing. But with the water we have lots."

Sam recognizes that their environment differs from that of their customers as the majority run cattle on high desert ground. Knowing this, Sam says they run cows as tough as possible. "Our bulls have worked for our customers for the past 60 years, and we can assure them of this because the guesswork is already done."

The right cattle

Sam says with each breeding decision, Shaw Cattle Co.'s mission is to produce cattle that will make its customers money and cattle that will go out and work in a tough environment. "Structural soundness is a huge deal, along with udder quality and temperament," Sam says.

Sam continues the Shaw family's legacy of collecting data and building performance behind the cattle they raise and sell. "We try to collect every piece of information we can from the animals — not only for us but for our customers," he says. "Every one of them wants something a little different so we try to provide them with what they need. Regardless of their emphasis, our cattle are data and performance driven."

Sam says it's his responsibility as a seedstock producer to ensure they produce and sell quality cattle. "It's our job to make sure the cattle are right when we market them," he says. "We make sure there are no genetic or structural problems and that all bulls pass a semen and fertility test. Not all our bulls will have the same expected progeny differences (EPDs) because our customers want different things, but the main



Sam Shaw and his wife, Janel, are pictured with daughters (l to r) Lydia, Gwen and Ava.

part is for us to make sure they are a sound, quality product. My grandfather would always say, 'Never chase an extreme. The fad will come and go, but if you are somewhere in the middle you'll hit twice instead of being on one end or the other.'"

Shaw Cattle Co. genotypes all replacement females and bulls it sells. "We try to use proven genetics that keep us where we want to be," Sam says.

A family business

Shaw Cattle Co. is truly a family business. Sam works daily with his father, mother and brother, Tucker, who returned to the ranch with his family in 2003. Sam says the key to their success is simple — communication.

"One thing I've learned is if everyone is talking, days go by smooth," he says. "My brother is active in the Idaho Cattlemen's Association so he's gone a lot, and I've been gone a lot, so we've had to even ramp up communication lately to make sure things are getting done."

Though each Shaw is involved in all aspects of ranch decisions, Sam says they have found niches and roles to fill. Sam focuses on mating decisions and artificial insemination (AI) schedules. Tucker's focus is on the land and irrigation plans. "When Tucker moved back to Idaho from an insurance job in North Dakota, he brought with him business expertise," Sam says. "That's when we decided to run this more like a business with us having more at stake and more to lose."

Both brothers help market cattle, but Sam says his dad still contributes in this area because of the many relationships he's formed with customers over the years.

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“We’re where we want to be,” Sam says. “We’ve grown from annually selling 100 bulls to 450 thanks to great help and great employees and we still have time to do family things.”

Sam and his wife, Janel, have three young daughters, and Tucker and his wife, Angie, have five children. “The kids seem to enjoy the ranch,” Sam says. “We don’t know which one will come back, but what we do every day is for our kids and the next generation.”

Time on the Board

When Sam took the helm as American Hereford Association (AHA) president last year, he followed the path of service to the Hereford breed set before him by his grandpa and dad. Sam was also continuing a path he set for himself which began with him serving on the National Junior Hereford Association board from 1995 to 1998, the year he filled the role of president.

Thinking over his tenure on the Board Sam says, “I couldn’t have been on the Board at a better time because of the upward trend in Hereford popularity,” he says. “Registrations have gone up every year and this year each AHA entity was profitable.”

Sam was just out of college and living at home when Greg was AHA president. He remembers his father’s tenure in contrast to his own. “When he was on the board, the trend wasn’t as good,” he says. “It was after the merger of the horned and polled associations, and they were trying to save the breed.”



Sam Shaw is pictured with grandparents Mary and Tom Shaw who began the family’s Hereford herd in 1946.

He chuckles thinking back to those moments. “The phone rang all the time,” he says. “I couldn’t talk to any of my friends and my Mom couldn’t talk to any of her friends because dad was on the phone so much. So mom and I put our own phone line in the house and only gave the number to our friends. When dad was on the Board the Hereford breed was in a different place.”

Sam attributes the breed’s successes today to past Board members and breeders who struggled through change to improve their future. “It’s because of guys like my dad that Hereford breeders are reaping the benefits of today,” Sam says, noting the introduction of programs like Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™).

“We had a great year this year but was it because of my leadership? No, it was the leadership of the last 20 years that put us in that direction. I hope in 10-20 years people will look back and say those guys sure got us in the right direction. I hope what we did this year will help breeders in 20 years.”

Sam notes that he and fellow Board members worked with staff to increase the frequency of genetic evaluations from two to 10 runs per year. He also is proud of the staff brought on in the past few years, who work with the Board to keep the AHA in the right direction. “I hope we will see these decisions as benefits in the years to come,” he says.

Q&A with AHA President Sam Shaw

Q: What do you consider to be the five highlights of fiscal year 2016?

- Registrations are the highest they have been since 2000. This year alone we saw a 4% increase in registrations.
- Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) tonnage sold is 3 million lb. higher this year.
- We have a tremendous staff in place from top to bottom and the American Hereford Association (AHA) continues to hire valuable people.
- The bull sale average remained strong and number of bulls sold was up 10%. This is an indication that times are good and there is more of a demand for Hereford genetics.
- Personally, a highlight this year for me was being able to travel and meet other Hereford breeders. It has been such a rewarding year.



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

A: We have to continue to improve Hereford cattle. We have a tremendous breed with many strengths, but we should continue to work on our weaknesses. We’ve made incredible progress and got rid of some of our weaknesses, but we have to continue making our breed better and culling problems out — we cannot go backwards.

AHA Vice President Terri Barber says working with Sam has been one of her most memorable and enjoyable leadership opportunities to date.

“His work ethic, dedication to selflessly serve the Hereford breed and enthusiasm for success have all made him a true role model with big footsteps to follow,” she says. “I have appreciated his humble and genuine personality, which has made serving on the board even more enlightening for all.”

Challenges and lessons

While serving on the Board, Sam says a valuable lesson he learned is that each breeder in each region is different. “Realizing the need to understand the breed from another perspective was vital.”

And, he says, diversity is what keeps Hereford breeders in business. “If we all did the same thing there would only be half the breeders there are. We have to be diversified and just a little different to market our stock.”

The greatest challenge this year, however, was being apart from the family business. “My family made it happen,” he says. “I had to be gone a lot, and work still needed to get done. I was glad to go out and meet so many Hereford breeders, but it was challenging being away from my responsibilities.”

Sam is thankful for a family that lit a fire in him for ranching and one that still supports him. “My grandpa and dad gave me the opportunity to follow my dream and my passion,” he says. “I still look up to my dad every day. I still make a lot of decisions but there’s not one big decision I make that I don’t run by him first. I’m so glad he’s as active today as he was 20 years ago. I enjoy my job, but I enjoy working with my dad.”



AHA President Sam Shaw says Hereford breeders must continue to make choices that will move the breed forward.

Future of the breed

As Sam wrapped up his tenure on the Hereford Board of Directors on Oct. 29, he encourages breeders to look beyond their own operations and to consider the future of Hereford cattle as a whole. “The AHA staff and Association represent a wide variety of members,” he says. “We all need the Association to do things for us, but we have to look at the big picture and figure out what is viable for the whole membership. I truly believe the AHA’s job is to provide us tools to market our cattle. And that’s why we pay dues to a membership organization.” Sam says it’s rewarding to leave the Board knowing the Association has strong leadership in place.

He also encourages breeders to continue to improve their herds: “Continue to select the genetics that will advance the Hereford breed.” **HW**

Q: What are some of your favorite memories from your time on the Board?

A: By far it has been meeting breeders, traveling and seeing Hereford cattle in different parts of the country.

Q: How do we continue to gain commercial market share?

A: I think we as seedstock producers have to continue to produce the products that will make the beef cattle industry better. We’re in an industry that is producing red meat and it’s important for us to create a quality product that families will want to purchase or give a premium for. This is where CHB comes in — when consumers see our brand we want them to know they will have a good eating experience with their purchase. The consumer is the end goal, and the genetics we are selling in turn produce the beef that feeds consumers.

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

A: My goal was to make the breed better and to continue to improve the Hereford breed by giving

members the tools they need to help market cattle the way they want to. Today, I still think that should be the No. 1 goal of the Association. Yes, we should continue to do things like expand CHB, and improve the efficiency of record keeping and data collection — those are the little things, but one big goal is tools that make our breed better.

Q: Considering the challenges facing the Board and the beef industry in general, what do you think Hereford breeders need to address?

A: It all goes back to the end product and asking, what are we trying to do with the Hereford breed? For the Association, what’s going to drive the breed is what our bulls produce for the commercial sector. Our national cow herd is predominately black, and we need to focus on what those Hereford-influenced steers and heifers are going to do down the road. Our branded program, CHB, will help us create a greater market for our product. **HW**