

Thousands of young cattle enthusiasts have had many of their best memories through involvement in the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA). The NJHA hopes to shape young, responsible leaders, and it has done just that. Many NJHA alumni are in the industry now raising Hereford cattle, taking on impressive careers and even bringing their kids back to the Junior National Hereford Expo every summer. Follow this series to read more about just a few past NJHA members who are making a difference in the industry.



Passion Pays Off

With Hereford roots, young agricultural educator Hayley Miller is leaving a lasting impact on the youth of Clever High School's FFA.

by **Haley Stark**

Being a lifelong cattle enthusiast, a dedicated agricultural educator and an ambitious advocator is no easy feat for most, but for 24-year-old Hayley Miller, it's a lifestyle she proudly represents, tackling obstacles with nothing but a smile. Standing at just five feet tall, Hayley is the new, energetic agricultural teacher at Clever High School, Clever, Mo., and she's certainly paving the road for a very successful youth program, but her involvement doesn't stop there. Hayley comes from Hereford roots with a passion for the cattle industry, and despite her hectic schedule, she still finds time to go home, help

out on the farm and support her younger siblings in the showing.

A Hereford-rich history

Dive into southern Missouri, and you'll find yourself surrounded by rolling, lush green hills accented with the uncut grass blowing in the wind. Tall, unwavering trees pop up on the horizon and across the pasture, and just beyond the white fence lines are the red and white focal point — Hereford cattle.

Outside the picturesque property, there's a tradition of quality and family at Miller Herefords, Lebanon, Mo. Originally from Thorntown, Ind., Hayley's grandfather, George Miller, started

raising Herefords in the late 1940s after he graduated high school, and the family business continued to grow and to improve from there. The apple certainly didn't fall far from the tree when Hayley's father, Rusty, began buying his father's cattle after high school.

As for Hayley, she can't remember a time where they didn't have Hereford cattle. "It's what dad has always had," Hayley explains. "It's a family tradition."

Hayley recalls wanting to show as soon as she could as a child. Although the youngest age to show is just seven years old, Hayley and her older brother, Clayton, started working with cattle much earlier. Since then the Miller family has attended every Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) except for one, when it was hosted in Montana in 2001.

Showring success is something the Miller family pride themselves on. In 2008 they exhibited the reserve champion carcass steer at the JNHE. With several class winning heifers in the following years, their JNHE accomplishments were once again highlighted in 2010, when they had the grand champion cow-calf pair. One year later, Hayley showed the 2011 JNHE Grand Champion Bull, a memory still standing out as a favorite.

Hayley is proud of a heifer they exhibited recently at the Missouri Cattlemen's All-Breeds Junior Show. There they represented the quality the Hereford breed offers and took home reserve supreme heifer.

"Beating out all the other breeds — that was really cool," Hayley says.

The banners were rewarding and unforgettable, but for Hayley the value of traveling and making connections was truly priceless. Attending nearly every JNHE set the stage for lifelong friendships within the cattle industry and opened Hayley's eyes to the diversity found in different states.

“When we went to Tunica, Miss., there was cotton everywhere and that was completely different for me,” she recalls.

Although home had always been Indiana, Hayley’s dad had his eye on land in Missouri. He dreamed of a life where he could solely focus on raising cattle, different from his life in Indiana where the family also farmed grain crops.

The Miller family’s luck turned around in August of 2013 when the combination of cheaper, yet nicer, land resulted in them buying a house and property in Lebanon, Mo.

Today, Miller Herefords consists of 440 acres, and of the 180 head of cattle they own, they still maintain a small herd of approximately 45 Herefords. Sitting east of their house they have a showbarn with seven head for Hayley’s younger sisters. They also operate a small embryo business on the side.

Early education

Premier leadership, personal growth and career success are qualities with which Hayley’s become quite familiar. She’s no stranger to agricultural youth organizations as a 10-year 4-H member and five-year National FFA Organization member.

During her time in these organizations, Hayley participated in livestock evaluation and served in numerous leadership positions. While these organizations were incredibly important to her, Hayley still wanted to prioritize her farm responsibilities at home and take care of cows on the ranch.

“When I was in elementary school, I could drive out to the pasture and say: ‘Yeah this calf’s this one and goes with this cow,’” Hayley explains. “As soon as I started judging, when we calved all our cows out I had to say, ‘let me go look at the tag’ instead.”

Even though her extracurricular activities kept her busy juggling both, Hayley doesn’t regret devoting time to livestock judging. In fact, the interest served as a stepping stone to her career, granting her a full ride



The Miller children pride themselves on showring success, raising numerous champions and capturing multiple banners in their lifetimes.

to Illinois Central College in Peoria, upon graduating high school.

After completing her associate degree in two years, Hayley transferred to Oklahoma State University (OSU), where she dual majored in animal science and agricultural education.

For Hayley, the decision to pursue a career in education was simple. She remembers being in kindergarten and telling her mother she wanted to be a teacher. She stayed committed to her dream.

While attending OSU, Hayley was involved in Collegiate FFA and Block & Bridle. She worked at the university’s beef unit briefly until she found an additional job at a local farm working cattle.

Hitting the ground running

Because Hayley dual majored, she attended OSU for an additional semester before graduating in December of 2015. After completing her bachelor’s degree, Hayley planned on spending time at home helping out on the farm.

However, a few months after graduating, Hayley was in route to go back to Oklahoma to help her former boss for two weeks and

to judge a show, when she received a phone call about a job opening at Clever High School. Hayley stopped by and interviewed on her way to Oklahoma. A week later the school called, offering Hayley the agricultural instructor position, which she accepted, and she quickly started in February 2016.

Initially, Hayley described starting in the middle of the school year as overwhelming.

“It’s not like I had a month to get prepared — I went and jumped in,” Hayley explains. “That was intimidating, but I loved it.”

Hayley embraced the opportunity and was determined to make a difference with her new students in just a few short months. She asked her students for their input and wanted to know what they wanted to learn most within the realm of the class’ specific requirements. When she can, Hayley likes to give her students a choice and to have them contribute to their individualized education.

A new year

When Hayley started her job at Clever High School, she had approximately 40 students enrolled in agriculture programs. By the time the new school year started in the fall, Hayley learned she had 80 students enrolled. This number further grew to 100 the following spring.

Hayley attributes this growth to her leaving a positive impression on her students and their word of mouth. She also prioritized improving the relationship

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Even with her busy teaching schedule, Hayley still makes time to visit home and tend to the family’s Hereford cow herd.

between the community and her agricultural program.

During her first full year of teaching, Hayley taught a range of year-long classes including ag 1, ag 2, ag construction and greenhouse. She also instructed semester-long courses of advanced animal science and food science.

Haley showed flexibility and innovation throughout the year. The ag construction class, for example, encompassed hands-on skills like welding, woodworking and electrical work. Here students were encouraged to build their own projects and to execute their textbook knowledge into real-world applications. With an animal science and cattle background, Hayley had to put in extra effort to master the skills she would later teach her students. For her the job required continuous learning.

“There’s a lot of days I stay after school, practicing and perfecting what I’m going to teach my kids,” she says.

Her goal is to be as hands-on as possible while still stressing the importance of textbook knowledge. Hayley wants her students to see real-world agricultural applications, even if they can’t travel in person to production facilities.

This year Hayley was teaching her students about modern swine production, but she struggled with teaching what the inside of a real hog barn looked like without being able to leave a classroom setting. Her solution came as she merged traditional learning with technology.

Hayley found videos online showing tours of real hog production facilities. Playing these for her students gave them a way to see modern management practices from the convenience of the classroom.

The Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET), an online bookkeeping system designed specifically for tracking agricultural education experiences, was another teaching component Hayley implemented into her classroom this year. AET provides an alternative way to record each student’s Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) to traditional paper record books and award applications.

Using these supplemental teaching aids gives Hayley’s students numerous ways to learn and to master material taught in class. To Hayley, the moment they finally grasp a concept is what makes teaching completely worth her effort.

“Seeing the look on a student’s face when they get something, when it finally clicks — that’s the best part,” Hayley says.

Being a new, fresh-out-of-school agricultural teacher does offer its challenges. For Hayley, the greatest obstacle is balancing a strong and caring student-teacher relationship with her students. For most agriculture students, it’s the countless

hours poured into SAEs, officer teams and contest teams that make other members and their advisor feel like family. The case is no different for Hayley, but it’s most important to her to first establish respect in her classroom and FFA program.

“I have expectations for my students,” Hayley explains. “I can’t always be a laid-back advisor or teacher and it’s difficult figuring how to do that.”

Hayley is quick to admit she is constantly learning in her career and leans on her agricultural teacher mentor and on-campus teacher mentor for guidance.

Carli Jo Epperly, agriculture educator at Crane R-III school district and Hayley’s teacher mentor, speaks highly of Hayley’s journey as an agricultural teacher. Epperly points out Hayley’s compassion, enthusiasm and quality work ethic have created a more active program with a welcoming environment.

“Hayley brings a fun and positive view to the agricultural program at Clever which not only helps to share her love of agriculture, but also sparks the interest in her students to grow more agricultural enthusiasts,” Epperly says. “Hayley is not afraid to ask questions if she needs directions, however these days she is asking fewer and fewer because she has grown more confident in herself and her program over the last year and half. She continually impresses me with her drive to improve herself and her students’ lives.”

Realizing that many other agricultural education majors may find themselves in similar situations Hayley has experienced, she’s quick to offer the advice, “Take a deep breath.” Hayley also reminds new teachers that it’s okay to say “no” and delegating is imperative.

Community involvement

Reestablishing a strong connection between Clever’s FFA program and the surrounding community is at the top of Hayley’s priorities. This year she worked to rebuild community support while giving her students interactive projects.

A grant from Tractor Supply Co. and the National FFA Organization has allowed the agriculture program



This year students have installed an additional four beds and have also been working on the landscaping, utilizing weed fabric covered with stone, around the community garden before it is fenced in. There is still room to expand on the garden in the future as well as to allow students to keep up with the eye appeal of the garden.

to build a raised bed community garden near the greenhouse. Students may use the garden for their SAE projects and it has been opened up to the community.

Hayley also set up a mentor program focusing on the nearby junior high agricultural program. There, Hayley is striving to improve junior high FFA membership and to connect older FFA members with younger students.

The Clever FFA Chapter invited community members to attend FFA-hosted events like Clever's annual back-to-school barbeque and the end-of-the-year banquet. Hayley hopes getting community members at these events will raise support for activities.

Because the FFA is a student-lead organization, Hayley often delegates activities to her seven-member officer team. She provides students the opportunity to plan, organize and execute ideas into successful FFA events like hosting a petting zoo at their local fall festival and educating children about agriculture.

Ryan Shurvington, Clever FFA president and Area XII secretary, says he admires the community service events Hayley has implemented into the program because they give the students a chance to educate the public about agriculture.

"My favorite part about having Hayley as my ag teacher is the fact that she never lets you give up on the goals you've set," Ryan says. "She has also inspired me to follow in her footsteps in becoming an agricultural teacher myself."

Hayley credits a lot of the program's growth to improved community support and intends to building better connections with local supporters.

Making the connection

For Hayley, growing up in the cattle industry continually serves as an asset to her education career. Traveling to shows, gaining experiences and being surrounded by the livestock industry have given Hayley insight she can now share with her students.

This year Hayley took her animal science class on an industry field trip to Butler Polled Herefords



FFA members are helping to educate elementary and preschool students about livestock animals and their importance to agriculture and to them.

in Republic, Mo. There, her students learned embryo transfer technologies firsthand.

This experience not only gave Hayley's students an account of real-life agriculture and skill application but also exemplified the benefit of building a professional network.

"I wouldn't be able to do these things with my kids if it weren't for the cattle industry and the connections I've made because of it," Hayley says.

Hayley also pulls from her past trials and tribulations to help her students deal with obstacles. When she was younger, Hayley ran for the junior board and wasn't elected. This experience made her stronger, and she often tells her students, "There's no such thing as failure, it's just a first attempt at learning."

In fact, Hayley strives to teach students the same standards by which she lives. In her classroom, mistakes are just as valuable as successes. She stresses the importance of respectful debates and polite advocacy, especially when students in class have differing opinions of modern agricultural practices.

Future hopes

Hayley is hopeful her FFA program's growth will continue with more students enrolling in agricultural courses. Her motto for both the classroom and the family operation is "constant improvement and positive change."

In the future Hayley would like to incorporate a livestock lab and farm with her program. These would allow her students, especially those enrolled in her animal science class,



One of Hayley's students examines an embryo under the microscope during an industry field trip.

to gain more hands-on knowledge with the livestock industry.

In terms of the cattle industry and the world of Herefords, Hayley is excited to see her younger sisters hit the showring. She frequently attends shows to support her family, see old friends and make more connections.

One thing is sure, Hayley is just scratching the surface as an agricultural teacher with her go-getter attitude and bubbly personality. Her dedication to her students, innovation within her classroom and commitment to progress in the Hereford breed are a true rarity. She represents a determined work ethic in a younger agricultural generation, and her ambition should serve as a catalyst for success within her FFA program for years to come.

"Being an agricultural teacher makes it easier to stay involved in the industry," Hayley explains. "If you aren't teaching it, you're advocating for it." **HW**