

# A Passion Set on Fire



## Abbygail Pitstick begins her journey as the National Hereford Queen.

by *Kayla Jennings*

The application had been filed, the interviews were over and the week at the American Royal was coming to an end. While the weight should have been taken off the candidates' shoulders, the anticipation only built for seven young Hereford enthusiasts in contention for the crown. These young women came from diverse backgrounds, both personally and geographically, but they shared one common goal — gaining the title of National Hereford Queen.

An infectious grin and a twinkle in eight-year-old Natalie Pitstick's eye said it all when Abbygail Pitstick, South Solon, Ohio, was announced and crowned as the 2017-18 National Hereford Queen during the 2017 American Royal National Hereford Show in Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 29.

In that moment, Abbygail remembers holding back tears after seeing the excitement in her little sister's eyes and on her mom's face. She jokingly recalls, "I had to tell myself to 'hold it together, we have to take pictures!'" The first National Hereford Queen from Ohio is now setting out to inspire many young girls, like her

younger sisters, to chase their dreams with all they have.

Abbygail is the 17-year-old daughter of Neil and Elizabeth Pitstick. She also has three younger sisters, Madison, Emma and Natalie. She has been a member of the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) for four years and is currently serving as the Ohio Buckeye Junior Hereford Association president. After she completes her senior year at Miami Trace High School in May, she plans to attend Wilmington College, Wilmington, Ohio. While there, she will double major in agricultural business and animal science.

In the coming year, Abbygail will be a role model to the youth as she serves as the face of the American Hereford Association (AHA). She will travel to all the national shows, as well as advocate for the Hereford breed and agriculture as a whole.

"I'm looking forward to the next year serving as the National Hereford Queen," she says. "As the face of the Hereford breed, there will be many roles to fill, but I'm excited to take it head on. I hope to meet as many Hereford breeders as possible and serve as a positive role model for the youth in our breed."

### Embarking on a journey

Her family owns and operates a diversified farming operation where they grow corn and soybeans and raise Hereford cattle. When Abbygail is not at school or participating in FFA events, she finds great joy in spending time with her family and helping on the farm.

She affectionately remembers her dad sharing stories with her about his childhood raising Hereford cattle. Since his childhood, the family had sold out and focused exclusively on row crops. Abbygail is credited with the reintroduction of Herefords on their farm four years ago. It was her first Hereford heifer that set fire to a passion sure to last Abbygail a lifetime.

"When I got into cattle and discovered my passion for it," she explains. "I knew I found where I needed to be."

Abbygail, along with her two youngest sisters, own and operate Sisters Livestock Co. LLC. They make all the decisions from breeding to nutrition. That responsibility is quite the undertaking for three young girls, but Abbygail enjoys the challenge. In an effort to establish herself as a



young, progressive breeder, Abbygail is artificial insemination (AI) certified and spends countless hours researching best management practices to maintain herd health and development.

Their involvement does not end on the farm. Abbygail and her sisters get the opportunity to travel to state and national shows with their cattle each year. This is where Abbygail first became familiar with the NJHA and the queen program. "I had fallen in love with the breed," she recalls. "When I realized there was a National Hereford Queen, I said to myself, 'I am going to be her one day.' I set that goal then."

She saw the influence the queen had on youth, and she knew she wanted to serve in that role. It wasn't long before Abbygail earned the chance to represent Ohio as its Hereford queen. Her favorite moment as a state queen was the opportunity to interact with the younger girls in the showing.

"That is the most rewarding part because you know you are the role model for our youth," she notes. "That is really important to me because I want to continue building our breed, and getting our youth involved."

As the national queen, she says, "I want to be there and support the youth during their journey in NJHA." She recognizes the value in growing awareness for the breed and that it starts with the youth. In her reign as queen, she hopes to play an integral part in growing the queen program, as well as other youth activities within states and the country.

In addition to her efforts with youth, she looks forward to expanding her network. She remembers the feeling of family that overwhelmed her when she first became involved with the Hereford breed. To her, the road to becoming National Hereford Queen was much more than a contest. This was a life-changing week as she took a step, or two, outside of her comfort zone to foster relationships with friends old and new.

"I have so many people supporting me in this journey, and I look forward to meeting even more Hereford breeders from across the country," she says.

### What the future holds

Today, Abbygail is a senior in high school who has just experienced a dream come true, but she has even bigger plans for tomorrow. She has aspirations of learning all she can in order to return to the farm and work with her sisters to grow their herd in numbers and quality.

"I have really come to love the animal nutrition side because of my experience in the Hereford business," she explains. "I think that track will be valuable as I grow in the industry."

Although Abbygail is an independent, driven young lady, she credits her motivation and success to her family. "Family will always be there for you and mine are my biggest role models," she notes. "They have had a huge influence on who I am today."

With their support, she says she hopes people remember her as a queen that let her positive personality shine and remained dedicated to the breed.



Abbygail pictured with her mother, Elizabeth, and her sister, Natalie, moments after being named the 2017-18 National Hereford Queen.

As the excitement will inevitably begin to wear off in coming months, Abbygail says she will never forget the significance of this experience in her life.

"It has been quite a journey, but one that was well worth it. I have learned so much, and being the National Hereford Queen is something I only dreamed of. I still can't believe that is a reality." **HW**



Hereford royalty honored during the 2017 American Royal (l to r) are: **Annah Dobson**, Johnson Creek, Wis., 2016-17 National Hereford Queen; **Abbygail Pitstick**, South Solon, Ohio, 2017-18 National Hereford Queen; **Megan Marion**, Bainbridge, Ind., first runner-up; **Devin Bollman**, Bellaire, Texas, second runner-up; and **Rachel Bagnell**, Platte City, Mo., Miss Congeniality.