

# Balanced Approach

**Gregory Polled Herefords' longtime commitment to producing high-quality cattle has kept the operation going for four generations.**

by *Austin Black*

**F**or more than 85 years, Hereford cattle have dotted the pastures along Houston Rd., near Houstonia, Mo. It started with a wedding gift for E.H. and Mary Gregory from Mary's father in 1932. The horned Hereford heifer became the foundation for E.H.'s commercial herd. In the late 1940s, E.H. started buying registered polled Herefords.

"I think he liked the disposition of the Hereford cattle," says J.D. Gregory, E.H.'s son. His

first set of heifers came from an association sale in Fulton, Mo., and made their home in the front pasture. "That was his pride and joy in front of the house," J.D. says.

In 1955, E.H. made a trip to North Platte, Neb., to buy his first polled Hereford bull. He purchased the bull out of Orville Kuhlman's winning carload lot in Denver. "Dad had a '55 Chevy car and rented a trailer to bring the bull back on the car," J.D. says. It was the start of a long-standing



The Gregory family has been raising Herefords near Houstonia, Mo., for four generations. Pictured (l to r) are Kevin and Barb Gregory, Brian Sneed, Jennifer Gregory-Sneed, Rhett Sneed, J.D. Gregory, Reagan Sneed, Morgann Gregory, Jordann Gregory and Ben and Devann Catlett.

tradition for the Gregory family. J.D. and his brother joined the operation and Gregory Polled Herefords was born.

### The early days

From day one, Gregory Polled Herefords has worked to produce high-quality cattle that meet the needs of commercial producers. The Gregorys hosted annual production sales on the farm from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. Then again in 1990 and 1992. “We always tried to sell around 80 to 100 lots,” says Kevin, J.D.’s son.

In those days, J.D. traveled the country buying cattle and later selling “family lots” in their production sale. “We did a lot of business in Arkansas and Mississippi. Then we’d go north to Minnesota and the Dakotas,” Kevin notes.

They also bought cattle in Kansas, Iowa and Illinois. Most of the Hereford producers were small and would trade cattle back and forth. J.D. would buy bred heifer pairs with heifer calves and put them in the herd back home. After a few years, he would sell three to four generations together in their sale.

After Kevin joined the operation in 1987, the farm transitioned from a production sale to private treaty and association sales. “We’ve always been in a couple associations and have sold with the Missouri Hereford Association sale,” Kevin says. “It got to where we could sell more off the farm and get really good prices.”

### Making better cows

Today, Gregory Polled Herefords has grown from a half-dozen heifers to approximately 100 registered and commercial cows. Kevin’s daughters and grandchildren comprise the fourth and fifth generations to raise polled Hereford cattle under the farm name.

The main herd consists of 80 head of registered females, most of which are spring calvers. “We try to shoot for a 60-day calving period,” Kevin says. “We start calving around Feb. 10 and by April, we’re usually down to only three or four left.”

The Gregorys market some females through registered sales, but their focus is on bulls. “We try to produce bulls that will go back and help the next guy down the road,” Kevin says.

They work to keep their cattle progressive. “We need to be a cycle ahead of our buyers,” Kevin says. This requires the Gregorys to think outside the box regarding their breeding program. “A lot of guys will come to buy bulls and are looking for that next step to better their herd, but they don’t want to spend a ton of money,” he says. Some customers want to add size and performance to



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their herd. Other buyers have large-framed cows and need a more moderate-framed bull.

Focusing on quality genetics and production traits helps the Gregorys raise bulls to fit any operation. They only offer the best of the best. “We’re trying to get a little better animal out there, so we’re being picky,” Kevin says. “We used to keep 20 bulls back. Now we only keep 10 head back.”

Most of their customers are commercial cattlemen with black-hided cows. “They are seeing the value of black white-faced calves,” he says. But the baldie trait isn’t the only thing customers like about Gregory Polled Hereford bulls. “A good disposition helps,” Kevin says.

He recalls one customer who looked at the bulls with his wife. When they drove into the pasture, she didn’t want to get out of the truck with the bulls near. Kevin reassured her it was fine and explained that his daughters helped feed the bulls every day.

A few minutes later, the wife stepped out of the truck and watched the bulls walk by. One bull happened to stop and sniff her hand before cruising on down the pasture. That was the bull the couple bought. Later, the husband told Kevin that his wife now feeds the bull every day — something she had never done.

“That makes you feel right about what you sell,” Kevin says. “If we keep bettering ourselves it’s bettering others, too.”

The Gregorys also have a small commercial herd of Hereford-based cows crossed with Red Angus. The combination keeps the baldie appearance while incorporating hybrid vigor.

About 15 years ago, Gregory Polled Herefords started selling heifers in the Show-Me-Select program. “Most times we sold straight Hereford

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heifers bred to Red Angus, but recently we've sold F1 females bred to Red Angus," Kevin says.

The demand for their females continues to grow, and the Gregorys plan to build their commercial herd. "We're trying to expand the commercial side, but keep it as a closed herd. That way we know the background on the cows and can build on it," Kevin says.

The two breeding programs complement each other well. "The Show-Me-Select sales give us an outlet to supplement the purebred side of our operation," Kevin says. "People see our females that may be looking for a purebred bull."

Part of the progressive breeding program at Gregory Polled Herefords is stringent female selection. They try to keep both their herds closed and raise their own replacements. "Sometimes we have up to three generations of females on the farm," Kevin says. "With the girls coming in to the operation, we were bringing in a few females. But now, we might just buy two or three cows each year. A cow has to be a functional female. She has to milk and have a good set of numbers behind her."

This is especially important since the end result is a herd bull. "When a customer looks at the bull, they look at the numbers first," he says. "We try to balance out the paper side with the animal side."

### Showing strategy

Another area Gregory Polled Herefords tries to balance is the showing. "We've had a lot of heifers we've shown that made phenomenal cows," Kevin says. The farm has always shown cattle and done well. But they've never sacrificed performance for a purple ribbon. "I don't look for the extreme side of it. I try to find the middle and find out the cow's background."

The approach has worked well. The Gregorys often place in the top end of their class and



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have won division champion several times at the Missouri State Fair. "When we were having production sales on the farm, we had good cattle but not show cattle," Kevin says. They would advertise their sale in agricultural publications, and people came because they recognized the name.

"People would show up at the sale because they saw us at the fair," he says. It's still the case today. Showing has helped their bull sales grow in recent years, and the Gregorys have several repeat customers.

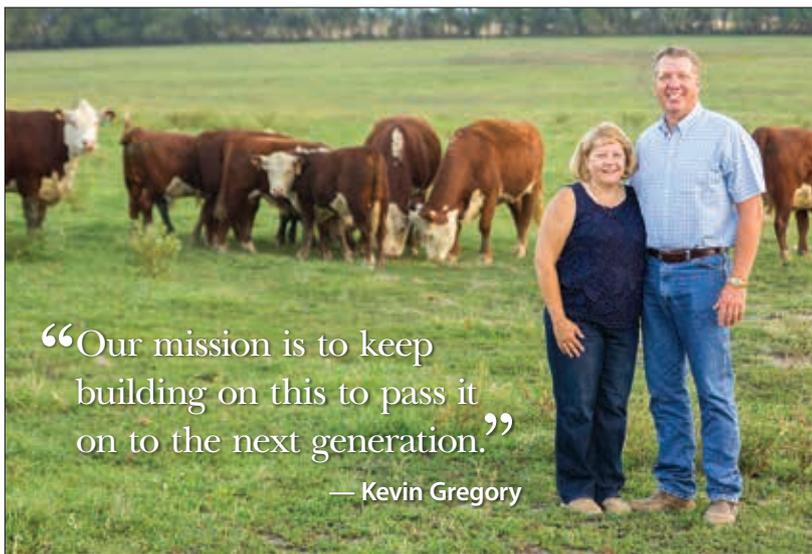
### Continuing the legacy

It's no question Gregory Polled Herefords is built on a lasting legacy. From celebrating 85 years of showing at the Missouri State Fair this August to having four generations stay in the operation, the Gregorys take pride in their Hereford heritage.

"It's in our blood, and it's something we enjoy. I just like looking at green pastures with red-white-face cows," Kevin says.

J.D. is proud his grandkids and great-grandkids want to raise cows. "It's something you always dream of," J.D. says. "You always dream they will carry on the tradition of what my father started."

Keeping the family involved is what drives Gregory Polled Herefords to succeed. Kevin says, "Our mission is to keep building on this to pass it on to the next generation. Grandpa started this cattle operation, and he never wanted to keep getting bigger. He wanted to produce top quality animals. We want to keep producing top quality animals and keep our family tradition going." **HW**



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— Kevin Gregory