



The Stiefvater family pictured standing (l to r) are Ella, Colton, Mike and Hadley. Sitting are Carie and Skylar.

Enjoying Their Hereford Journey

This South Dakota family has found fun, friendship — and a few big awards — via their involvement in the Hereford breed.

by *Kindra Gordon*

Ralph Waldo Emerson famously wrote, “Life is a journey, not a destination.” It’s a quote that encourages savoring the unexpected twists and turns along life’s path — and for the Mike and Carie Stiefvater family of Salem, S.D., involvement in the Hereford breed has brought enjoyment to their journey.

This has included having their children participate in the 2015 and 2016 Junior National Hereford Expos at Grand Island, Neb., and Madison, Wis., as

well as earning several awards, including the reserve champion individual commercial steer in the first National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Fed Steer Shootout in 2017.

The Stiefvater family includes four children: Hadley, 16; Ella, 14; Colton, 10; and Skylar, 5. Mike owns and operates Salem Veterinary Service, where Carie and their children are often found assisting. Additionally, the family is active in 4-H and FFA, raising and showing livestock,

participating in judging and leadership contests, and conducting scientific research projects.

Carie grew up with Maine Anjou cattle. Once she married Mike, he insisted on raising Angus. Their veterinary clients and kids drew them to starting a small herd of Herefords.

Hereford start

Carie tells that about five years ago, a client encouraged their then 10-year-old daughter, Hadley, to apply for a heifer grant offered by the South Dakota Hereford

Association. Hadley received the grant, which created the opportunity for her to purchase her own Hereford heifer at the South Dakota Excellence Sale. She purchased a young heifer consigned by Steve and Lori Repenning from Mitchell. Her younger sister Ella decided she also wanted a Hereford, so a second heifer was purchased from the Repennings, and the two girls began their Hereford journey.

They showed their heifers and the following year purchased two more Hereford heifers to show. But, because the Stiefvaters don't calve until May, they soon realized it was challenging to show heifers that would continue to be productive with their herd. Thus, they then switched to showing Hereford steers, and by this time Colton was old enough to begin showing, as well.

The Stiefvaters have selected steers from Delaney Herefords at Lake Benton, Minn., and Gerlach Herefords, operated by Jeff and Donna Gerlach at nearby Stickney, S.D. This transition to Hereford steers in their path of life has created a few more fun opportunities.

Special steers

In 2015, Colton's first year in 4-H, he named his Hereford steer Lujan, after his favorite South Dakota State University (SDSU) football player at the time, Zach Lujan, the quarterback. Lujan (the steer) grew to be more than 1,800 lb., and had a 4.1 rate of gain, which earned him the rate of gain award at the 2015 South Dakota State Fair. At that event, Randy Daniels was the 4-H steer show judge, and he admired Lujan so much that he requested a special photo with Colton and the steer after judging the show. Lujan also earned an invitation from SDSU to the Beef Bowl Football game on campus in September, where he was on display — and Colton was all smiles.

After that experience, Colton has continued to name his 4-H



Colton and Lujan had a special bond from the start — captured in this third place JNHE photography contest entry by his sister, Hadley.

steers after members of the SDSU football team — for 2018 he has Coach Stiegelmeier in the lot.

Hadley also had a special connection to Lujan. A photo she snapped of Lujan and Colton placed third in the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) photo contest in Grand Island. Meanwhile, Ella's close-up photo she took of a Hereford's eye earned her first place honors in the photo contest. Ella has also found herself in the winner's circle on occasion with her Hereford steers.

Of her Hereford experiences Ella says, "There are a lot of good contests [at JHNE]...I like entering photos, the marketing contest and



Ella enjoys entering photos such as "Eye of the Bovine," in the JNHE photography contest.

the quiz bowl. You gain a lot of industry knowledge."

Mom Carie adds, "Our favorite thing about doing activities in the Hereford breed is that it's like family. It is competitive during the day, but

continued on page 40...



Pictured (l to r) at the 2015 South Dakota State Fair are Hadley Stiefvater, Skylar Stiefvater, Colton Stiefvater, Carie Stiefvater, Mike Stiefvater, Randy Daniels (judge) and Ella Stiefvater showing Lujan.



Hadley Stiefvater showed her steer, Snelling, at the 2016 JNHE in Madison, Wis.

at the end of the day there's a family atmosphere. Even if you only have 10 Hereford cows, everyone welcomes you to the group."

One more triumph

In 2016-17 another special Hereford steer impacted the Stiefvater family. This steer, who had the nickname Barney, wasn't expected to make a difference — but he did. He was the progeny from one of the first Hereford heifers Ella purchased from the Repennings and was sired by a bull from Gerlach genetics. Ella recalls he wasn't a healthy calf, and by October 2016, they didn't anticipate he'd make a show steer. She was initiating a science fair project for FFA and intended

to study if supplementing weaned calves with Amaferm® (a BioZyme® supplement) for 30 days enhanced their performance.

Ella wasn't sure she wanted Barney in her project because of his lackluster health history. But, as she randomly assigned calves to the feeding trial by running them through the chute, Barney came through and was assigned to the Amaferm trial. Ella was worried he'd be an outlier in her data, but her veterinary father told her science is science and Barney needed to stay in the trial. She reports that she was surprised because after two-weeks on the supplement, Barney began to bloom.

Ultimately, her research trial showed that all the supplemented calves were heavier and healthier after 30 days than their non-supplemented counterparts. Incidentally, Ella's agriscience project won the state FFA Animal Systems Division 1 and qualified to be presented at the 2017 National FFA Convention.

Meanwhile, Barney wasn't done yet. The Stiefvater family learned of the inaugural NJHA Fed Steer Shootout contest being held with steers going on feed at Tabor, Iowa. They decided that Colton should enter Barney. Therefore, in January 2017, Barney and two other Stiefvater entries were put on feed at Gregory Feedlots to compete against about 70 other steers enrolled in the contest.

From January through September, Colton and his family then had opportunities to watch webinars and track performance data, and to learn about the harvest process. Carie notes, "It was a great opportunity for our kids to learn that the industry is much more than just showing cattle."

The steers in the contest were harvested in September, and in October, Colton was invited to travel to Kansas City, Mo., to learn the results. Mike, Hadley and Ella were at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis at the time, so Carie, Colton and Skylar made the Kansas City road trip with Jeff Gerlach.

Carie says they didn't tell Colton where they were going, but when they pulled into Kansas City about noon, his face lit up because he knew they were there to hear the results. Later that night, Barney was announced as the reserve champion individual commercial steer in the NJHA Fed Steer Shootout. This earned Colton a belt buckle and banner and produced a "glowing smile from ear to ear," says his mom.

About that same time, Ella was sending her mom a text from Indianapolis — her FFA agriscience project was announced the same night as the national winner.

"It was so amazing that the calf that was in both Ella and Colton's winning projects came from one of our first two Hereford females," says Carie.

That's testament to the philosophy that life is truly a journey to be enjoyed — with all the unanticipated twists and turns.

Looking forward, the Stiefvater family anticipates attending the 2018 JNHE in Grand Island, Neb., where Hadley, Ella and Colton will participate in contests. They also anticipate participating in the Fed Steer Shootout contest again eventually. The family's youngest child, Skylar, is just 5 and is eager to start catching up with her siblings' activities and accomplishments. **HW**



Colton Stiefvater, Salem, S.D., consigned the **reserve champion individual commercial steer** in the 2017 NJHA Fed Steer Shootout. Pictured (l to r) are Kevin Shultz, 2018 AHA president; Colton Stiefvater; Steven Green, NJHA chairman; Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs; and Annah Dobson, National Hereford Queen.