



From Start to Finish

Work ethic and determination pay off for Hereford Junior Herdsman of the Year.

by Kayla Jennings



Kati Fehlman received her Hereford Junior Herdsman of the Year buckle from NJHA board member Austin Matheny and National Hereford Queen Abbygail Pitstick.

One by one, champion females entered the ring as thousands of Hereford enthusiasts anxiously awaited ringside for the judges' selection. Among them, the anticipation was building in a young lady for a different announcement. Before the champion female was selected, the captivated audience turned all attention to Kati Fehlman, Junction City, Kan., when she was honored as the 2018 Hereford Junior

Herdsman of the Year July 7 during the 2018 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Grand Island, Neb.

This was a dream come true for Kati and her family. As she stepped out onto the shavings to receive her buckle, a flood of emotions overwhelmed her — this was her

biggest accomplishment as a National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) member. All her hard work and dedication to raising and showing cattle had culminated to the pinnacle of NJHA membership.

“It was quite an honor and pretty overwhelming to be selected,” Kati says. “Just to be nominated was an honor in itself, but to win the junior herdsman was a real achievement.”

The 20-year-old daughter of Howard and Debra Fehlman has been active in raising and showing Hereford cattle for years. She attended her first junior national in 2008 in Kansas City, Mo., with one heifer. Little did she know, that one heifer would spark a passion to grow her own cattle operation.

Deep roots

Kati credits her start in the cattle industry to her parents. They ran a fitting service in the late '80s and had cattle throughout her childhood. Her parents always showed Herefords, so it was natural she carried the family tradition when she was old enough to hit the showing.

“Herefords are the breed for me,” she says. “That is where it all began. I started with one Hereford heifer and went to my first junior national in 2008, and it has just blossomed from there.”



Kati's longstanding passion and love for Hereford cattle began in 2008, when she showed at her first junior national.

Today, Kati has 14 cows and is expanding her herd. She has sold many high-quality bulls and retains females to grow her operation further. While she has put in the hard work to build her operation from the ground up, her parents are always available for support and guidance.

“They have always wanted what is best for me, and they have always helped me get to where I am,” Kati says. “They are the reason I am what I am today. At the same time, they have let me do it on my own. They have not tried to force me into it.”

The freedom to make decisions comes with its own challenges. The journey has not been easy, but Kati is quick to note it is well worth the effort.

“I have learned if I want things to go right and be successful, I am going to have to work for it,” she says. “It won’t just be handed to me, and learning that is something I have really appreciated. It is something I will always be grateful for.”

A desire to learn and to strive for excellence has resulted in the opportunity to work for several different ranchers across many breeds. Among those, Gary and Kathy Buchholz, Waxahachie, Texas, can attest to the young breeder’s work ethic and passion for the cattle industry. Kati has worked with GKB Cattle for more than four years at shows across the country, a relationship that began before she could walk. Gary recalls when he and Kathy were junior advisors, they knew Kati would be in contention for this prestigious award one day.

“Kati is the definition of a true herdsman because she does all her own work, all her own breeding, and she knows her stuff,” he explains. “She excels so many others because of her work ethic and the fact she does it all herself.”

Gary says she can breed cattle, evaluate them with an unbiased eye, take care of them and then turn around to get show stock ready with the best of them. “I have always said you can be good, but the ones that have to tell you about it aren’t really good,” he says. “Kati puts it in her heart and through her work ethic shows

others she is good. You can’t buy that. She is one of the most trustworthy people I know, and she is truly part of the family.”

Experiences with operations like GKB Cattle and Hoffman Ranch have set the tone for a future in the cattle industry. “I have looked up to GKB Cattle and Hoffman Ranch,” Kati says. “When you see their name or brand, you know exactly who it is. I would like to eventually be well known and successful like them.”

Outside the ring

There is no doubt Kati is well on her way to achieving that goal. A hands-on approach to breeding, calving and showing has elevated her success as the years have gone on. “Everything on our land is mine, and I think that is what has made it more exciting when we do well,” she notes. “It all goes back to my breeding, and I haven’t had any help.”

As she continues to grow, she places emphasis on utilizing technology like artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET). In fact, she recently attended AI school and has been able to AI some of her own cows. She has pursued some ET work, and she says it is a component she would like to utilize more as her operation grows.



Howard and Debra were overwhelmed with excitement for their daughter as she received the prestigious honor.

In addition to AI work, she has raised high-quality bulls to show and then to retain as herd bulls. As a junior Hereford breeder, Kati has been fortunate enough to see her hard work yield success in many arenas. She notes many champion honors across the state and division champions in the national circle.

“Being able to build off those foundational females to breed my own and turn around and have them be successful in the showing has really been a milestone for me,” Kati explains. “I think having the reserve national champion bull at the junior national this year was a big milestone,

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Kati took home reserve champion bred-and-owned bull honors with KT'S Hawk 605.



too. He was my own breeding out of a cow I raised. That was pretty important to me and something I had tried for — for a long time.”

Even so, those successes do not come without challenges. Rookie cattle producers and seasoned ranchers alike have experienced a breeding decision gone wrong or another unfortunate circumstance. Kati finds comfort in knowing one tough year does not dictate the future.

“There will be another year you can breed that cow back and now you know what not to do,” she says. “That just better your operation because you get

to know it better, and you get to know each individual cow better.”

That mindset has lent itself to many learning experiences in the cattle business. Like Kati says, “You can either put a lot of work into it and it turns out great, or you can let things slide, and they don’t turn out the way you want them to in the end.”

At the end of the day, showing success is only one small component of the operation. Like a true herdsman, Kati’s favorite part of the cattle business is calving and watching those calves grow into exceptional breeding pieces. For her it is the day-to-day work with cattle that spurs her longstanding passion and excitement.

“Something I have been fortunate enough to do is to have the show cattle turn into unique breeding tools I can use further on down the road,” she says. “Their career spans far beyond just the showing and I think that is very important.”

More than cattle

While the cattle side is where Kati’s true passion lies, the Hereford breed has provided more for her. “There is a lot of camaraderie in the Hereford association and people being there for people,” she notes. “Being able to walk around the barns and every 10 feet knowing someone to talk to is pretty awesome for a breed this big with this many people.”

As she prepares to turn the last page of her showing career at junior nationals next year, she notes it as one of her favorite shows. “You put in so much work all summer, and junior nationals is the highlight of the summer here on our place,” she describes. “It makes it fun to go for that week. All your hard work kind of pays off, and you get to catch up with people you haven’t seen in so long.”

Her hard work certainly paid off this year as she experienced perhaps her most memorable JNHE. “The Herdsman award is kind of the pinnacle of what we all should strive to be,” she says. “I think it is different than winning the heifer show or winning the bull show. It is the all-around award, and it really meant a lot to me because it is always something I have strived to be — a Herdsman. It truly meant a lot.”

As for the young showmen who are just starting, Kati advises they enjoy and cherish every moment. She encourages younger members to always do their best but, most importantly, to remember it all starts at home.

“If you don’t enjoy it then you regret doing it,” she explains. “If you enjoy it then it is not work, and it is fun when you really think about it. I think that is something that has really helped me — I have really enjoyed it. I have never been pushed to raise cattle, and I think that has been what keeps me pushing forward.” **HW**

Herdsman finalists



Keayla Harr is the 21-year-old daughter of Jeff and Lou Ellen Harr from Jeromesville, Ohio. She graduated from Casper College in Casper, Wyo., and is currently a senior at Kansas State University, as an animal science major with an emphasis in ruminant nutrition. After obtaining a master’s degree, Keayla would like to secure a job working as a ruminant nutritionist or in agriculture related sales. Keayla has been showing for 14 years and aspires to keep making the Hereford breed better.



Nigel Howe is the 21-year-old son of Doug and Jenny Howe from Wagontown, Pa. Nigel is part of Deana Jak Farms, where he currently works on the farm managing calving and herd health and making breeding decisions. Over the course of his show career, he has been recognized as the Pennsylvania Junior Herdsman of the Year and the Northeast Breeder of the Year and exhibited the Reserve Champion Junior Hereford Female at the National Western Stock Show in 2017.



Carter St. John is the 21-year-old son of Joy and the late Kent St. John. He is from Pell City, Ala., and has been showing Hereford cattle for 13 years. Carter notes winning reserve intermediate showman at the 2014 JNHE as one of his biggest accomplishments. He is currently enrolled at Jefferson State Community College, working toward a degree in business. Carter’s long-term goal is to stay involved in the cattle industry and to run his own Hereford operation.



Lucas Stumpf is the 21-year-old son of Gene and Lori Stumpf, of Columbia, Ill. He and his family raise Hereford cattle and farm grain. He will be a senior at Western Illinois University, majoring in agriculture business. Lucas has been showing Hereford cattle since he was 5 years old. After graduating, Lucas plans to return home to expand the cattle operation. **HW**