

A Year to Remember

Emily Meinhardt selected as the 2018-19 National Hereford Queen.



by *Kayla Jennings*

It is show day in Kansas, and sounds of cattle, clippers and blowers fill the air. The occasional booming laugh from a dad rings out among the murmur, and somewhere in the mix there is a group of giddy young Hereford ladies anxiously awaiting show time. With bows in their hair, sure to fall out three times before even making it to the showing, these young ladies have found a best friend in their state Hereford queen.

Little did they know their leader would soon trade her crown for a bigger one. Emily Meinhardt, Marysville, Kan., was crowned as the 2018-19 National Hereford Queen during the 2018 American Royal National Hereford Show in Kansas City, Mo. She is the 20-year-old daughter of Bryndon and Julie Meinhardt and is a junior at Kansas State (K-State) University. Emily has three siblings, Bryson (18), Rylie (13) and William (11).

At K-State, she is studying agricultural communications and journalism with minors in animal sciences and industry and leadership studies. Additionally, she is active in Block and Bridle and in Kappa Alpha Theta as the chief learning officer. She maintains two internships with the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the K-State Animal Sciences and Industry Department. As a member of her state association and the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA), she has been competitive in the showing, has participated in the photography contest and has taken part in the queen's tea.

Emily will spend the next year in her new role as the face of the Hereford breed and an agricultural advocate setting a positive example for young women.

"I'm so excited to start my journey as the National Hereford Queen," Meinhardt says. "Though I have only been involved with the program for a short amount of time, I have always looked up to the queens as role models, and I hope I can do that for someone else."

Igniting a passion

Emily finds true joy in setting an example for not only Hereford youth but also her own siblings. In her journey to the crown, she has paved a path worth traveling. Her passion for agriculture drove her to participate in 4-H, where she and her siblings showed cattle at local and state shows. Once she reached high school, she was quick to join her local FFA chapter and to pursue an opportunity to grow her school's Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) organization. She also stayed competitive playing volleyball throughout her time in Marysville.

Even with numerous activities on her plate, Emily knew she wanted to be a part of something more. While her family owns a farm equipment business in Kansas, she did not grow up directly involved in production agriculture.

"I envied the people that could say they were third generation farmers or ranchers and things like that, so I just started surrounding myself with those

kinds of people and learning from them," she explains. "I connected with the McKay family through my friendship with Seth. After he passed away, Grant, Linda and Bailey started taking me to shows with them. They recognized my interest in cattle, and they have shared their knowledge with me. The McKay's have given my siblings and me an opportunity to show, and we all work hard to honor Seth's memory."

In just four years, her passion for the breed has grown immensely. She has started to raise her own herd, using her first show heifer for its foundation. Fortunately for her siblings, they reap the benefits of showing those calves and will for years to come, as Emily looks forward to continuing to expand her herd.

Among one of her favorite moments showing Hereford cattle is her youngest brother William's

big win at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Grand Island, Neb., this past summer. As she tells it, her brother was not too sure about the cattle business, but after some encouragement from her and the McKay family, he was eager to hit the showing with his steer. The leap of faith was worth it in this case, as he hung champion honors in the steer show.

"That was just really cool, because this is his first year showing," Emily recalls. "I got to see him grow within the breed and see my sister help him, too. It was a family effort for all of that, and it was so exciting to see his passion for the breed begin like that."

William is looking forward to his next Hereford calf. For Emily, though, the joy is not in the banner but in the opportunity to share her own passion and to see it flourish within her brother. These relationships are what make it all worthwhile. Emily credits several role models for their part in growing her passion and excitement for not only Hereford cattle but also the agriculture industry.

Angie Denton, her supervisor at K-State, has served as one of her biggest supporters in the Hereford breed and during school, and other young ladies like Brooke Jensen and Taylor Belle Matheny inspired her to seek the opportunity to serve as a Hereford queen. Foundationally, she credits the



McKay family of Marysville for fueling her desire to get where she is today. Bailey McKay's involvement in the NJHA board showed Emily the larger scope of the organization and gave her the desire to pursue representing the breed on a national level. Lastly, Emily says she would not be who she is today without the love and support from her family.

"The cool thing about my experience is I got to pick the Hereford breed," she comments. "I get to learn as much as I want. I wasn't born and raised into it."

Emily has taken every opportunity to soak in each experience afforded her. Among the many, one of the most rewarding to this point was serving as a state queen. In that role she has held tightly to the reality that showing is much more than which calf goes to the backdrop; it is about the memories made. This philosophy has served her well during her reign in Kansas.

"Maybe you were last in your class or maybe you were first. It is about that, but it is also about making the friendships, the bonds and the memories with everyone," she notes. "I always try to interact with the kids at all times and have them help me in any way they can. Even though I might not be in my attire, they still look up to me. I think it's really important just to be there when you can."

This philosophy rings true outside the showing, too. Emily enjoys the opportunity to attend producer tours and meetings. For her, it is not just one component that makes it worthwhile, but it is instead the combination of it all. All these reasons culminated in her decision to run for the National Hereford Queen.

"I still enjoy going to all the shows because of being a role model to kids," she explains. "I think that's something the queen really stands for, because every little girl wants to wear that crown someday. It's something they look up to, so that's someone I try to be for little girls."

In fact, Emily glows with excitement hearing stories of the girls she has influenced already looking to be a queen in a few years. An agricultural communicator at heart, she truly lives for the stories of future, current and past Hereford breeders. The rich history is one reason this Association is so near and dear to her heart.

Excitement for the future

From her first heifer to now, Emily has experienced immense growth as a young



Emily with her family and longtime mentors. Pictured (l to r) are: William, Julie, Rylie, Bryndon, and Emily Meinhardt; and Linda, and Grant McKay.

Hereford breeder, but she knows the best is yet to come. She could not have predicted years ago she would be wearing the traditional white attire and crown with the National Hereford Queen sash, but she cannot be more grateful to wear the sash for the next year.

"I am really excited to be able to be a role model to a lot of girls that I haven't even met yet," she says with a grin. "I am also excited to represent all the heritage of the breed that's been passed down year to year. A couple weeks ago, I got to go ride around with a family, and see how they've poured their livelihood into this and all the past genetics. Knowing I get to represent this breed is such an honor. I look forward to trying to represent it in the most positive light that I can."

As Emily begins her reign as the National Hereford Queen, the queen's tea and the service project are already on her radar. She hopes the tea is not only a time for interaction among young Hereford ladies but also an opportunity to give back in a big way to youth outside the Hereford breed. Collectively, Emily offers advice she hopes those younger will take stock in.

"Follow your passion," she says. "There is a quote that says, 'You are the average of the five people you surround yourself with,' so surround yourself with people who want to achieve great things."

She has followed her own advice by latching onto the Hereford family. "I think what's really unique about the Hereford breed is just how progressive we are in genetics, but also with our youth and making them be the best leaders that they can, which I always really enjoyed focusing on," she says. "It's a great breed to be a part of because of that. I just think the life the Hereford breed has within the industry is really unique and something to be proud of."

Beyond her year in this role, Emily is excited to make her mark on the Hereford family, and she can't wait to foster passion in young members, much like she received from others just a few short years ago.

"I was welcomed into the breed with open arms, and everyone was just so loving and caring and willing to make my experience meaningful," she recalls. "They gave me the chance I never thought I would get the opportunity to have and I am so thankful." **HW**



Hereford royalty honored during the 2018 American Royal (l to r) are: **Abbygail Pitstick**, South Solon, Ohio, 2017-18 National Hereford Queen; **Emily Meinhardt**, Marysville, Kan., 2018-19 National Hereford Queen; **Melanie Fishel**, Kernersville, N.C., first runner-up; **Kira Sayre**, Arenzville, Ill., second runner-up; and **Lillie Blissard**, Water Valley, Miss., Miss Congeniality.