

A Personal Touch

Beef producers face a unique challenge to connect directly with consumers despite multiple phases of disconnect.



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May is Beef Month, and the American Hereford Association commends Hereford breeders and cattle producers for their diligence in raising the best beef in the world. The May/June issue of the *Hereford World* celebrates the success of the Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) program, beginning with the CHB Sires of Distinction on Page 38. As described by the Lafavers family on Page 44 and Cargill and US Foods Dallas® representatives on Page 50, consumers disconnected from agriculture crave connection with their food.

In this issue, a story on how Herefords are marketed and sold in the Northeast (Page 74) draws parallels to my six-week “farmstay” on a Northeastern pig farm. Except, instead of working in the northeastern U.S., I was in northeastern Australia. Therefore, this month I will share an experience from the other side of the world — a true “world’s perspective.”

Share your story

The Beattie family’s free-range hog operation was only a year old when I came on board, and production had been cut from about 40 to 20 sows due to legal battles with neighbors concerned about property values. I quickly found my place helping my host dad, Shane, and host grandpa, John, with the daily chores. We sold pork directly to customers at local farmers markets on weekends, where bacon was always a favorite. With limited numbers of live animals and a demand for individual cuts, pigs were finished at around 60 kilograms (132 pounds). John and I hauled them in the back of the “yute” to the abattoir and, with the help of a local butcher shop, Shane and I prepared cuts to sell at upcoming markets.

We had quite a loyal following at the markets. The key to building a strong customer base was through sharing the story of the farm — customers enjoyed pictures of pigs wallowing in the paddocks and loved photos of the family interacting

with the pigs. Shane would share pictures of his daughters, Leilani and Sophie, holding piglets and people absolutely ate it up. For customers without a tie to agriculture, a glimpse into the family’s livelihood served as the only medium for them to connect with the product.

Find common ground

Consumers are confronted with negative messages about beef, namely that the industry is unethical and unsustainable. Although nationwide efforts — like sharing the “upcycling” power of beef (Page 66) — are in place to quell fears, consumers need personal reassurance products they purchase are safe.

I was terrified of what lay ahead when I saw the coastline of Australia appear in the window of that Boeing 787. But fears of the unknown dissipated as I bonded with my host family over our shared values. As I write this, I’m reminded of snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef, bungy jumping in the Kuranda rainforest and skydiving over Cairns. Yet the heartfelt experiences that made the trip unforgettable are those of celebrating family milestones with the Beatties — like Leilani catching her first fish, my host mum announcing she was expecting their third girl and throwing a surprise 60th birthday party for my host grandma.

People connect with people. Whether beef is sold at a farmers market in Connecticut, a BBQ joint in Texas or an Everyday IGA retailer in Montana, marketing efforts require a personal touch. Connections form not because a few differences exist but because a few strong similarities exist. At that point, differences in lifestyles are irrelevant.

When it comes to marketing beef, be mindful of sharing relatable, reassuring values. A personal flare can make a difference in what brands consumers choose to serve their family. And remember, nothing is more universally understood than a genuine smile. **HW**