



# Good Business

**Farmer, leader and great-grandfather Glynn Debter, Horton, Ala.,  
inspires with strong will and dedication.**

by *Diane Meyer*

**H**e always dreamed of a cattle farm, but there was something else he had to do first. Back in 1952, a fresh-out-of-high-school, Alabama farm boy hatched a golden egg in the poultry industry.

Business took him from Birmingham, Ala., to New York City and back. Glynn Debter's success was laid on one principle: "If you give good service, and you have a good product and you do people right, that goes a long way in keeping your business. But you gotta do all of it."

### **A good egg**

It started with an agreement Glynn's father, Ross Debter, of Horton, Ala., had with his feed customers. Ross collected eggs and deducted the price from their feed bill, and then supplied the two Bruno supermarkets in Birmingham, 50 miles south. Glynn became a partner in 1953. He contracted with nearby farmers — supplying them with birds and feed in exchange for eggs.

They quickly took over the Birmingham market, and Glynn was in the driver's seat. Eventually, he

was introduced to two New York businessmen looking to supply eggs to The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P) — the biggest retailer in America at the time. The Debtors sent a trial



Glynn holds a picture engraved with a special message from Bobbie, "We don't remember days, we remember moments."

*(Photo on opposite page)* More than 70 years of breeding and selection have shaped Debter Hereford Farm's 2-year-old bull market. From the start, bulls have been bred with the commercial industry in mind.

batch to Long Island, and the quality of their eggs sealed the deal.

Then Cargill pursued the market. At first, Glynn was disinterested. But after six years of talks, he sold the business, which boasted 1 million hens, 55 employees, a feed mill, egg-processing plant and a new \$1 million egg-laying house (which still stands on nearby farmland).

Free of the egg business, the Horton farmer turned all attention to his registered Hereford herd — an effort started in 1948 with two bred heifers purchased with 4-H steer money. Still dreaming of a cattle farm, Glynn gradually added more cows and more acres while building the egg business. Of course, the two went hand in hand — chicken litter had to be utilized somewhere, and something needed to graze the fertilized ground.

Debter Hereford Farm came to life on ground passed down from Glynn's great-grandmother. Now the herd of 200 registered cows plus 50 commercial cows glean national attention.

Glynn echoes his grandfather's wisdom, "Set a goal, but when you get close to it, move it out. Don't ever get to it; keep moving it out, and keep working toward it."

From the get-go, Debter Herefords focused on the commercial cattleman. Herefords are well suited for the South's unrelenting heat and make ideal crosses with the region's staple — Brahman cows. The first-generation Hereford breeder lights up at the story that jump-started the herd.

"What really got us going good was when we bought our first bull from Jack Cooper in Montana," Glynn says. "He really turned things around for us."

Cooper and his half-brother, Les Holden, were noted performance pioneers and among the first Hereford breeders to embrace the Line 1 genetics developed at Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory in Miles City, Mont.

The bull was PW L1 Domino 6008, born in 1966, and Glynn had to campaign to get him. It took several years of convincing his business partners — Ross and Bobbie — of the \$5,000 investment. It turned out to be a worthy purchase; the first two calves out of Domino 6008 paid for him in full.

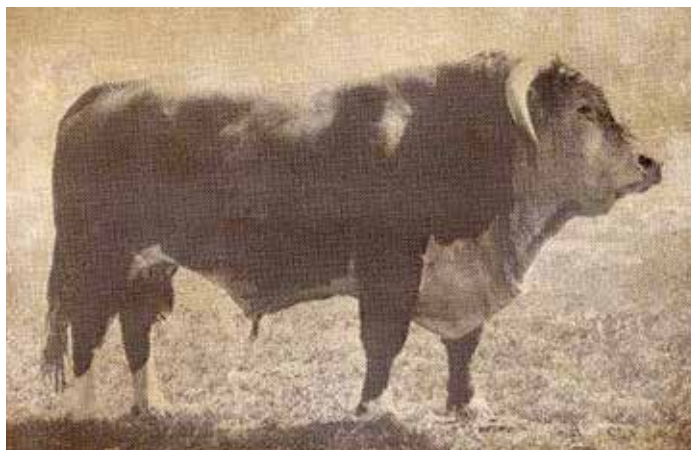
The sale marked the beginning of a longstanding partnership. Now, Glynn is known as

the man who went to 38 consecutive Holden bull sales, from 1971 to 2009. Since 1970, at least 60 Line 1 bulls from Montana's Cooper and Holden Hereford operations have matured into Debter Hereford Farm sires.

The Line 1 characteristics that attracted breeders at the outset remain the cornerstone of the Debter herd, including performance, uniformity, consistency and strong maternal traits.

**“If you give good service, and you have a good product and you do people right, that goes a long way in keeping your business. But you gotta do all of it.”**

**— Glynn Debter**



PW L1 Domino 6008, pictured in 1968, is credited as the herd bull that turned things around for Debter Hereford Farms.

The family bought their last cow in 2001 and developed their own replacements for two decades.

### **Answering the call**

While the operation's and Glynn's feats are validated through many awards — the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year and Pioneer awards, and the American Hereford Association's (AHA) Hall of Fame to name a few — if ever there is proof of Glynn's respect within the breed, it is his service on the AHA Board of Directors.

In the 1980s, Glynn reluctantly agreed to run for the Board, and when he was elected as vice president, it wasn't without hesitation.

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When he was president in 1988, there were small conversations about a merger between the horned and polled associations.

A few years after retiring, he got a call from Executive Vice President H.H. “Hop” Dickenson. The two boards had merged, and the directors slated 15 names to be considered as chairman. Glynn had made the list, though he thought the other names were more deserving. He got another call when he made the top 10, and again when the final name was selected. “We’re down to one name — don’t you make us start all over again,” laughed Hop on that call.

At the first meeting of the 24 directors, everyone started with introductions. When those wrapped up, Glynn remembers a distinct comment that turned the tide for the Board. “We’re not horned,

the couple had attended. It appeared out of nowhere in his study with a card protruding from its folds, shining under the sun’s spotlight. It was an Easter card from Bobbie, written a couple years earlier.

“The Good Lord had moved it from wherever it was at so I could find it,” Glynn says. He pauses, “I’ll tell you another story, kind of like that.”

On a dreary January day, Bobbie and Glynn passed a hitchhiker while driving to lunch. Glynn slowed the truck, but Bobbie didn’t think it was a good idea to pick up the stranger. They continued to the restaurant, and as they finished eating, the same man walked in the door. Glynn watched as he counted the change in his pocket and proceeded to order one chicken finger.

Glynn says, “The Good Lord said, ‘That’s the second time you’ve had a chance to do

something. What are you going to do?’”

So, he paid the waitress with extra change and requested, “When I leave tell that man to eat what he wants to.”

Months later, Bobbie was in heaven and Glynn was in the hospital. His throat muscles had quit working, and the only option was to put in a permanent feeding tube. When the widowed Glynn had to face this new reality back home on the farm, a distant memory resurfaced.

“All of a sudden that homeless man appeared to me, counting that change,” he says. “He was doing the best he could with what he had, and I said, ‘That’s what I gotta do. I have to take my situation the way it is and just do the best I can with it.’”

That story went untold for three years, until he shared it with friend Gordon Jamison at a Montana bull sale. Gordon observed, “That wasn’t a homeless man. That was an angel.” When Glynn confided in another friend, he heard the same revelation.

### Live poor, die rich

With an enduring spirit, Glynn finds strength in his pride and joy — family. Of all life’s experiences, this great-grandfather’s favorite memories are the births of his kids and grandkids.

“They come first,” he says. “They work hard and they’re good at it, and I’m proud of them.”



Pictured (l to r) are four generations of Horton, Ala., cattle producers: Perry, Kanin, Glynn, Emma, Rebecca and John Ross. Glynn shares, “Family is important. That’s my number one priority right now.”

and we’re not polled, we’re Hereford breeders,” he recounts. “From then on, we worked to be Hereford breeders.”

### Walking among us

Glynn’s wife of 61 years, Bobbie, was his rock as he led the operation and the breed. The two met in high school, though they stayed friends at first. One evening after an uninspiring date, Glynn drove to Bobbie’s house, only to find her heading out for a date of her own. With some convincing from this surprise guest, she excused her first caller and went on her last first date.

A couple years after her passing in 2015, Glynn found an old program for a National Finals Rodeo

He describes how son, Perry, and grandson, John Ross, are naturals at running the operation, noting their honest and thorough approach to customer service.

Perry is proud of his father's work ethic. "You don't inherit it, you learn it," he points out. "It's not a given, I promise you."

Likewise, John Ross looks up to his grandfather's dedication to his trade.

"Whoever works the hardest will always come out in the end," he learned from Glynn. "If you put in your time, you'll get to reap the rewards."

All three cattlemen are proud of the upcoming generation, who are showing interest in the farm and work as hard as any hired hand.

"There's a saying, 'Farmers live poor, and they die rich,'" Perry shares. "We're working for the next generation. You want to take care of the land, so the next generation doesn't have to fix it."

Indeed, the generations of Debtors to call Horton, Ala., home have ended the day with strong backs and full hearts. Whether selling eggs door-to-door



Pictured (l to r) are Glynn Debter, his daughter-in-law, Joyce, and son, Perry, at the 2018 Holden Herefords Sale in Valier, Mont.

a dozen at a time or hauling bulls halfway across the country, each family member has a sense of commitment they learned from one another, living by Glynn's gospel: have good service, have a good product and do things right. **HW**