



# Mississippi's Marketer

Jack Hedrick grew up in the Hereford business and devoted his life to marketing the breed.

*by Katie Maupin Miller*

“Sold” may be the most important phrase in the Hereford business, says Jack Hedrick, cattle sales manager and owner of JDH Marketing Services LLC, Columbus, Miss.

While sale day is full of excitement, with the chant of the auctioneer, the shouts from the ringmen and the buzz in the bleachers, it’s not the atmosphere that spurred Jack into his life’s work. It was simply the knowledge that this one day could make or break that family’s year. Months of hard work and preparation had been poured into a set of cattle, and on that day, the crowd would decide their worth.

“It’s that farm’s most important day of the year. They have a lot riding on that day, and I always try to give it my best,” Jack says. “I don’t care if it is the first animal in the ring, the last one, a bucket calf or a pet donkey that they’re selling at the end. Every animal is important.”

### A family tradition

The Hedrick family has a long history in the Hereford business. Jack’s grandfather, Perry Hedrick, owned a Hereford operation in the tiny town of Anutt, Mo. Perry was a polled Hereford Pioneer Breeder, whose photo once graced the halls of the polled Hereford headquarters.

Perry’s love of polled Herefords didn’t skip a generation, though. Jack’s dad, Roscoe “Rusty” Hedrick, was recruited by legendary



Jack (left) and his brother, Gary (right), pose with their grand champion calf in the early '60s. During this time, the brothers lived on Circle M Ranch where their father, Rusty, was the manager. Both brothers remain in the Hereford business — Jack as a sales manager and Gary as the owner of White Hawk Ranch.

polled Hereford breeder M.P. “Hot” Moore to join Circle M Ranch in Senatobia, Miss., as a herdsman. Jack was a youngster when his father was tapped to manage Circle M, and he grew up immersed in ranch life.

Jack was drawn to sale day and the men and women behind the scenes from an early age. As a ranch manager’s kid, Jack witnessed firsthand the hard work, creative marketing and just plain professionalism poured into each successful sale. Circle M Ranch sales often averaged more than \$6,000 per head — a sizable investment in those times — and Jack vividly recalls the excitement as Moore, the buyers and his family posed with high-selling lots.

Jack’s father’s talents as a herdsman were in high demand, and in 1966, the family left Circle M and moved to Damascus, Md., where Rusty prepared show and sale cattle for Col. E. Brooke Lee’s Silver Springs Farms. When Washington D.C.’s urban sprawl began to encroach upon the

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Spending his formidable years on Circle M Ranch instilled the excitement of sale day in Jack Hedrick. He enjoyed watching the men and women work behind the scenes, preparing for the auction, and ranch owner, M.P. “Hot” Moore, was a master marketer. Often buyers would take photos with their new purchases, including this shot from a 1967 production sale. Pictured behind the bull from left to right are Gary Hedrick, Jack Hedrick, Hot Moore behind Jack, Jack’s mom Mary Hedrick, Col. E. Brooke Lee, his wife Nina, Rusty Hedrick, and at the halter Tate Fancher. On the block are auctioneers (l-r) Jewett Fulkerson and “Ham” Hamilton.

farm, the Hedrick family moved a portion of Lee's cowherd to a farm in Columbus, Miss. Jack and his wife, Mary Helen, still reside there today.

You could say Jack's childhood was the cattle equivalent to an Army brat, as the family moved a few times, managing different Hereford operations around the country. With every move and change in the Hedrick family's life, there was one constant — Hereford cattle. For Jack, this meant that no matter where they lived, he was quick to find friends through their 4-H clubs with similar interests as his own.

### Hitting the road

While in Columbus, the Hedricks started their own Hereford operation called Yikes Farms. But, the economic inflation of the '70s made it hard to carve out a living in the cattle industry, so Rusty started working cattle sales. In 1975, just a couple of years out of high school, Jack hit the road doing the same.

At this time, Jack started working with Bill Maerli from Missouri. Maerli taught him the skills needed to clip and fit sale cattle. After a couple of years on the road, Jack met Eddie Sims of National Cattle Services, Inc., from Elgin, Okla. As Jack tells it, Eddie "pretty well picked me up and made something out of me."

Jack went to work for Sims in 1978. During that time, he spent days on the road with Eddie's brother, Dale "Slim" Sims, hauling chutes and equipment between sales so they could clip, fit and prepare the sale cattle. Under the tutelage of the Sims brothers, Jack learned more about successful sale management as he traveled around the country. They taught him how to prepare cattle, but most importantly, they taught him about the people.

"I shook a lot of hands working with National Cattle Services. I met a lot of breeders, and I met a lot of people," Jack says.

Many of those industry connections mentored Jack along the way, such as auctioneer Jim Birdwell and livestock photographer Don Birk. And those connections would become even more important when Jack started his own sales marketing company, JDH Marketing Services LLC, in 1988 after a decade on the road with National Cattle Services.

As he will tell you, successful sales management is almost like a team sport where managers call upon the best in the industry in their trades — photographers, catalog designers, videographers, clippers, fitters, ring help and auctioneers — to help prepare for a successful event.

People like Johnny Winston from the American Polled Hereford Association, auctioneers Bo Swilley and Dale Stith, and



Jack Hedrick fit his fair share of sale and show cattle, including Matt Sims' national champion open show heifer at the 1987 National Polled Hereford Show. Jack and Matt embrace after the win as good friend and ringman DeRon Heldermon looks on. Matt's father, Eddie Sims, is the owner of National Cattle Services, Inc., where Jack Hedrick cut his teeth in the sales industry.

“When I showed up at a rancher’s place, I gave it all I had, and I always tried to do the best for them.”

— Jack Hedrick

industry influencers like Neil Orth, Dave Maples and Dick Beck helped open doors for Jack as he built and diversified his business.

Now, more than four decades later, Jack has worked his entire life in the cattle sales industry and has never received a salaried, bi-weekly paycheck. Instead, like the farms and ranches he assists, Jack depends on robust markets and successful sales.

Through all the years, though, the farmers and ranchers he served have always been the most rewarding part of his job. There are several sales Jack works with that he has served for more than 35 straight years. The sort of tenacity and grit it takes to ride the ups and downs of the livestock industry is something Jack not only learned from his clients but admires about them.

“The cattle are very, very important, but it’s the people that make it happen. That is the thing about the breed. There are some awesome people in this business,” he says.

#### At home

As a man who has marketed cattle in most of North America, Jack didn’t always have the luxury of spending a lot of time at home, which makes his wife, Mary Helen, an important part of JDH Marketing Services LLC’s success. The couple met on a blind date and dated for seven years before Rusty announced over the mic at a production sale that if Jack didn’t marry her, he’d disown him.

Rusty was a good judge of character because Mary Helen capably held down the fort while Jack was on the road — working a full-time job, caring for their son, Dustin, working sale details behind the scenes and even pitching



Jack Hedrick loves to work the ring and has done so for four decades. He continues to work the ring today.

in to haul equipment to and from sales on the weekends.

Today, if Jack isn’t at a cattle sale, he may be on the lake with Mary Helen, Dustin, Dustin’s wife, Carleigh, and their one-year-old grandson, Thom. The Hedrick genes still run deep in their love for agriculture — Jack’s brother Gary owns White Hawk Ranch, his brother Curtis hauls livestock and his sister Marcia resides in Houston, Texas. If Jack wants to be remembered for anything, it is simply this: “When I showed up at a rancher’s place, I gave it all I had, and I always tried to do the best for them.” **HW**

#### Many Thanks

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