



Feedlot Education

National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members learn about the cattle feeding industry and their cattle genetics at the inaugural **NJHA Fed Steer Shootout Field Day.**

by *Amy Cowan*

“It is important to have events like this so young leaders like myself get hands-on experience at feedlots, and to share this knowledge with our peers at school and ultimately promote agriculture’s mission, which is to feed the world in a healthy, safe, wholesome way,” says Haley Mouser of Bemidji, Minn., a member of the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA).

Mouser and her brother, Cale, were among 65 participants from 13 states attending the first NJHA Fed Steer Shootout Field Day in April, sponsored by VitaFerm and Merck Animal Health. HRC Feed Yards of Scott City, Kan., hosted the event. That’s the same feedlot where 41 NJHA members from 15 states were feeding steers as part of the fifth annual Fed Steer Shootout (FSS).

“A lot of our members see the showring and the barn, but don’t see the end product and the hard work that goes into the feeding industry,” says NJHA Communications Chairman Bailey Morrell, of Willows, Calif., who participated in the Shootout and field day. She explains the focus of the program is providing members

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with real-world knowledge.

FSS participants enter individual steers or pens of three. They receive monthly performance updates from HRC documenting the progress of their steers. Ultimately, the champion cattle are the most profitable ones.

Participants follow industry best practices for herd health,

weaning protocols and Beef Quality Assurance (BQA). They have the opportunity to receive BQA certification.

Improving with facts

“One of the great things about the Shootout is the amount of information NJHA members receive,” says Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs. “For instance, the feeding and carcass data they receive can help them make genetic improvement decisions at home, ultimately making a better product for the industry.”

Along the way, FSS participants compete and learn about the cattle feeding and beef packing industries via videos, quizzes, a performance portfolio and an essay contest. This year’s field day was an extension of these educational



FED STEER SHOOTOUT

NJHA

opportunities. It included presentations from industry experts, such as Kevin Good from CattleFax, as well as Lee Mayo, HRC general manager and Kelly Bruns, director of the West Central Research and Extension Center for the University of Nebraska.

“The beef industry has always been known as a commodity industry. We produce a product and sell it at a specific value,” Bruns explains. “Aspects of this program help us identify areas where we can make improvement. By participating in the program, you have the ability to capture some of the data, see where you’re at currently and then set goals to bring about a better product.” He offered participants insights to evaluating cattle for yield grade and quality grade and their impact on profitability.

“What was okay 20 years ago is substandard today. It really doesn’t matter what you’re talking about,” Mayo says. “As everyone gets better and as the competition keeps getting better, we need to get better.”

Hardy Edwards of Winterville, Ga., was another FSS participant who travelled to the field day.

“I learned there are a lot of variables that go into the profitability of feeding cattle,” Edwards says. “You can always try new things, and if something goes wrong, you can always learn from your mistakes.”

In this case, participants can apply specific knowledge gained to career goals beyond feeding cattle.

“I was excited to get a feel for the environment and possibly for what I might be going into in the future within this industry,” Mouser says. “My future

goal is to become a ruminant nutritionist, but I want to minor in human nutrition. My passion, second to cows, is speaking to consumers and public speaking. I would love to have that degree in human nutrition, not to tell people what to eat, but to say that it’s okay to eat beef and here are the reasons

why you can eat beef and why it’s beneficial to your body.”

Awards for this year’s NJHA Fed Steer Shootout will be presented during the American Hereford Association Annual Membership Meeting and Conference in October. **HW**



Analyzing data at the NJHA Fed Steer Shootout (l-r): Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs with Hardy Edwards III and IV of Winterville, Ga.



HRC Feed Yards near Scott City, Kan., feeds steers for the NJHA Fed Steer Shootout and hosted the field day, led by HRC manager Lee Mayo (far right) and his wife, Katie. Thanking the hosts are (l-r) Befort, Bailey Morrell, NJHA communications chair, and Ralston Ripp, NJHA board member.