

Truth in Marketing

AHA field representative based his lifetime in the livestock marketing industry on trust and integrity.

by **Katie Maupin Miller**

Dr. B.J. Jones of Wildcat Cattle Company, Wisconsin, could have been nervous when he left a sizable sum to purchase a young cow sight unseen from a Michigan sale, but he wasn't. In fact, when his new female arrived exactly as described with change to spare, he expected no less. Longtime American Hereford Association (AHA) field representative John Meents handled the transaction.

While there are certainly several layers to successful livestock marketing — quality, genetics, advertising, sale preparation — at its core, the industry is still rooted in good old-fashioned integrity and trust. Meents has those in spades. And what became of Jones' big-ticket cow? Well, you can find her photo on Page 96, as she was just named the cow-calf pair champion at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

"I'm just so thankful that John could handle that transaction for us and give us the advice and the confidence to go ahead and buy her," Jones says. "If John hadn't been there on the other end, we might not have made that purchase that day. There are just a few people that I would trust to do that for us, and John was the guy."

Jones' new donor dam is just one example of the success Meents has heralded into the Hereford breed for sellers and buyers alike over his two-decade tenure. Meents' wisdom, insight and just plain honesty informed breeding and marketing decisions of Hereford breeders big and small. Although Meents retired from the Association in August, his impact will be felt throughout his nine-state region for years to come, including his lasting legacy of integrity.

Col. Kevin Wendt, Ohio auctioneer and longtime friend, worked more than 1,000 auctions with Meents over the years. "What I learned from John was to be honest and tell the truth; have faith that things will work out, but always be honest."



John Meents and his wife, Peg, (center) gather for their 2020 family Christmas photos in a sleigh Peg refinished.



John and Peg first met at the National Barrow Show in Austin, Minn.

Lifetime marketing livestock

After turning his tassel at Purdue University, Meents landed his first livestock marketing job as a fieldman for the American Yorkshire Club (AYC) in 1978. The first sale he worked was the record-shattering McGraw Yorkshire production sale that sold more than 760 head for \$283,195 — a record that still stands as the most breeding hogs sold in a single production sale.

Before the sale, Meents received the best advice a young ringman can receive from legendary swine auctioneers, Col. Mark Pickel and Col. Dan Baker — remember who bid and what they bid.

Armed with these words of wisdom, Meents traveled 98,000 miles in his 11 months of AYC employment. Then he was tapped by another livestock legend, Neil Orth, to join the *Drovers Journal* fieldstaff.

At the time Meents joined, the publication was hoping to create a swine-specific sister publication. So Meents dove in, driving many miles, visiting with producers about their stock for sale and learning about effective ways to use print advertisements. Meents cut his teeth in the

industry with livestock merchandising legends such as Wade Houser, Jay George, Jay Carlson, Lyle Eiten and Ken Torr.

Although Meents' role at *Drovers* changed to be cattle-centric rather than swine-focused, his dedication to helping producers find ways to sell stock never wavered. For 12 years, Meents did just that until the *Drovers* fieldstaff dissolved in 1991.

After *Drovers*, Meents worked briefly for the American Polled Hereford Association (APHA) before the many nights away from his young family called him home to Ohio, where he joined a local country store called, Hochstetters.

At Hochstetters, he peddled pet feed, and at home, he raised his children, Jay, MaeLyda and Emily, with his wife, Peg. The livestock industry didn't forget Meents' marketing talents though.

Previous AHA executive vice president Craig Huffhines called to see if he would work the ring at one sale. But, that one sale turned into another, then another, then another, before Meents was offered a role as the AHA Upper Midwest Region field representative. On Aug. 1, 2000, he officially started with the Association.

Bald-faced success

Every state newsletter column Meents penned ends with the sentence, "Make your cattle better today because you have to market them tomorrow," a sentiment Meents believed throughout his entire livestock marketing career. Whether a breeder registered two calves a year or 200 with the Association, Meents made himself available as a resource, sounding board and friend to AHA members. He worked hard to sell their animals — both in the sale ring and privately, offered industry insights for advertising and breeding decisions and cheered on multiple generations of Hereford showmen and women.

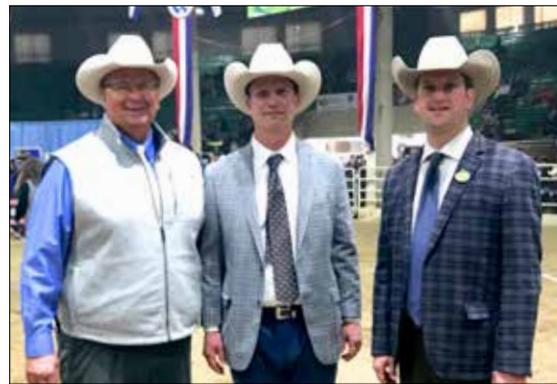
"If there was a sale that I could not attend, I called John Meents," says Charles Boyd, Jr., of Boyd Beef Cattle, Kentucky. "He was one of the very best at helping both parties — both the seller and the buyer — he represented everything accurately and sincerely, and I have the utmost respect in him for doing that."



AHA field representative John Meents (left) stands ringside with current AHA executive vice president Jack Ward (center) and previous V.P. Craig Huffhines.



Meents worked in the livestock marketing industry for most of his life.



One of Meents' favorite memories is recommending up-and-coming auctioneer Cody Lowderman to Dave DeLong and Tom Hawk to call the DeLHawk production sale. Pictured at the National Western (from l to r) John Meents, Brent Lowderman and Cody Lowderman.



Meents was trusted by buyers and sellers alike to give a fair and honest appraisal of the sale offering. "I've never been disappointed in anything John bought for me," says Dr. B.J. Jones.

Some of Meents' fondest memories are of times he helped breeders find success, such as Ellis and Judy Kahn of Stone Creek Farms, Wisconsin. Meents visited the Kahns early in his career and singled out a young Hereford heifer calf he expected to draw attention ringside. Ellis named that heifer "Fancy Judy," after his wife. Luckily for Ellis, Meents indeed picked a good one, and Fancy Judy went on to win Denver — making it one of the few times it is acceptable to name a heifer

after your wife. All the while, Meents cheered on the Kahns from the sideline and shared in their happiness and success.

For Meents, his members' success isn't limited to backdrop photos, though. Reflecting on his career, Meents feels some of his most significant contributions have been bolstering Hereford bull demand by establishing and improving Hereford and

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John Meents enjoys fishing, and he hopes to wet a line more often after his retirement in August.

Hereford-influenced feeder calf sales in Kentucky and Illinois. In the past few years, the Carthage, Ill., sale drew around 100 consignors annually.

AHA director of seedstock marketing, Joe Rickabaugh, sums up Meents career succinctly, “John is the epitome of a great fieldman. Taking care of his members is of utmost importance, and his dedication to his territory was second to none. His skill of selling advertising, creative service projects and working the ring puts him in a league of his own. He is a great and caring person, which many have come to realize during his 20 plus years of service to the American Hereford Association. A huge thanks to John—he will be missed by many in the Hereford breed.”



Jay Carlson (left) is one of the livestock marketing industry professionals that Meents (center) worked with and learned from throughout his career.



Meents is a familiar face to many in the Hereford breed and a tireless advocate for the AHA membership.

Whether they were commercially-oriented or showing-specialized Hereford breeders, Meents viewed AHA members as family. He remembered names, called to check in and was always there to lend a helping hand.

“He always has a smile. He’s enthusiastic.

He always knows your name, and he is an amazing guy to be around. He is really dedicated to his work and always happy,” says Dr. Mike McDonald of West Virginia of Meents’ character.

To those that know him best, it’s no surprise that family takes center stage in Meents’ life off the clock.

Home is where the heart is

Meents grew up in Remington, Ind., the youngest of four siblings — with twin brothers and a sister. There on his family’s farm, he learned about livestock. Consequently, his first dose of purebred seedstock was not cattle but Chester White hogs.

His Jasper County, Indiana, home housed some of the greatest Chester genetics in the country, including the infamous Jack Rodibaugh and Sons operation. So, by the time he was just 10 years old, Meents owned 10 sows. It was his 4-H show career that brought Meents to the bald-faced breed. He showed a Hereford steer in 1970 that stood second to the Indiana State Fair grand champion steer. Dr. Roger Hunsley sorted that memorable steer show. Although Meents came up just short of the grand champion banner, meeting Hunsley set him on a course for Purdue’s livestock judging team, where he rubbed elbows and made lifelong friends with the likes of Tom Farrer and Bruce Everhart, who are still in the livestock industry.

Today, Meents’ home is in Jenera, Ohio. He and Peg live across the road from her parents, and the couple runs a few crossbred cows and bale hay on their acreage. With retirement, Meents hopes to spend a few more nights in his bed, more time helping Peg babysit their grandchild, Myron, named for Meents’ father, and more time telling people about Jesus.

Meents is also excited to fill the pew of his church more often. Over the last 20 years, Meents was often on the road between 40-45 weekends a year, missing his favorite Sunday school class.

Looking back over his years as a field representative, often putting 50,000 to 60,000 miles on his car annually, Meents hopes to be remembered for one thing: fairness.

“I’ve tried to treat each member of the AHA equally, no matter if you registered one animal or 200 animals,” Meents says. **HW**