



Start Now and Never Quit

Mark St. Pierre led the Association the way he manages his family's Hereford operation.

by **Wes Ishmael**

How you live life each day is how you live your life," says Mark St. Pierre, 2021 retiring president of the American Hereford Association (AHA).

Rather than wait for the stars to align before starting down a road you want to go down, or know you need to traverse, Mark believes in taking intentional steps on the defined journey every day.

As hard to achieve as it is simple to say, that's how Mark approaches life and business. If it wasn't, odds are he never would have been in the cattle business, let alone agriculture.

Mark's dad was a prominent chemical engineer who worked for blue chip oil companies. His career led the St. Pierre family to reside in different parts of the United States and the world.

For whatever reason, though, Mark felt his calling was production agriculture. In fact, as he thumbed through the catalog for California Polytechnic State University, he thought a degree in farm and ranch management would be just the ticket, despite having no agricultural background or experience. Mark's dad suggested agricultural engineering might be a more sensible



With spring and fall calving seasons, Pedretti Ranches develops bulls year round to serve a long list of loyal commercial customers.

choice. He reasoned it would provide Mark a more likely foot in the door and maybe, just maybe, a chance to own or manage an operation one day.

Mark earned his degree in agricultural engineering. He had several job offers but decided on one with Pedretti Ranches at El Nido, Calif., owned by Gino Pedretti Sr. and his wife, Mona. Undoubtedly, part of the attraction was one of the Pedretti daughters, Kim, who Mark married.

El Nido is about 9 miles south of Merced, Calif., in the storied San Joaquin Valley. The ground here is buzz-cut flat, except for the strategic, imperceptible pitch that aids irrigation. If you have water, the fertile soils here will grow about anything imaginable nearly year-round. Lots of pistachios, almonds, fruits and vegetables come from this part of the world. There is also a lot of cotton and dairy cows — the other two underpinnings to Pedretti Ranches, besides registered Hereford cattle.

Mark manages the Hereford operation. Gino Jr., who they call "Corky" to avoid confusion, handles the farming. His son, Gino III runs point for the dairy operation. Gino Sr. oversees the business overall. While each manages various enterprises, they all work together.

Mark and Kim have a daughter, Christie, and a son, Matt.

Christie is pursuing her doctorate in exercise physiology and applied nutrition at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where she earned a masters degree in public health. She is a registered dietitian and also works in a meal delivery for DC Central Kitchen, a non-profit organization.

Matt and his wife Leah live in Merced with their son and two daughters. Matt is an ordained pastor in the Reformed Church of America. He co-founded and directs Restore Merced, a non-profit community development



Three Pedretti generations (L-R) Gino III, Gino Sr., Gino Jr. and Mark St. Pierre focus on different aspects of Pedretti Ranches, but also work together, leveraging opportunities across the operation.

ministry. Leah works part time for the Christian Alliance for Orphans.

Pedretti Hereford snapshot

Pedretti Ranches was an early adopter of performance testing and Line 1 Hereford genetics.

They've never wavered from either one.

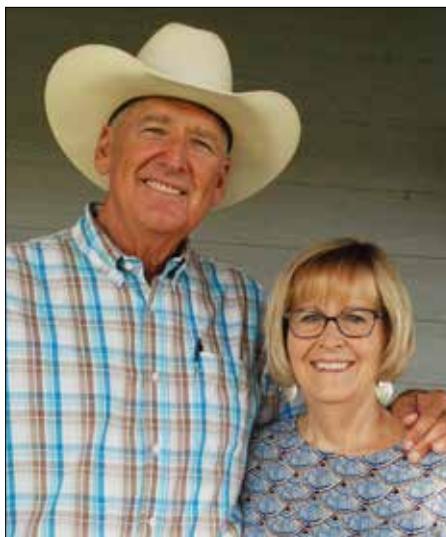
A painting of GB L1 Domino 804 hangs on the office wall. The 1988 son of CL 1 Domino 590 had more than 2,600 progeny and more than 700 daughters in production across the nation. Mark says 804 had the most impact of any bull Pedretti Ranches bred and raised so far. Bud Snidow, a gifted artist who served AHA members for decades, painted the picture.

GB L1 Domino 177R is another broad-impact bull bred and raised in the Pedretti operation. This 2011 son of GB L1 Domino 8143M is the backdrop of their ranch sign. With interests sold

to Hoffman Ranch, Thedford, Neb., and Cooper Hereford Ranch, Willow Creek, Mont., there are more than 900 177R progeny and 275 daughters in production.

Although line breeding comes with unique selection management challenges, the Pedretti Ranches crew covet the uniformity, consistency and predictability it provides their commercial customers. That's who Gino Sr. aimed at from the beginning.

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Visit Mark and Kim St. Pierre for the first time at their home south of Merced, Calif., and you won't be a stranger for long.

You can see the uniformity and consistency as you wander through the long-yearling bulls about the time private-treaty sales start in late summer. It's there in the numbers, too. That's one reason all of the yearling bulls are priced the same as each other; likewise the 2-year-olds. As might be suspected, there's a long line of repeat customers.

Registered Hereford cattle comprise a spring-calving herd and a fall-calving one. Mark explains the average cow age is just north of

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— Mark St. Pierre



Pedretti Ranches has been dedicated to line breeding and Line 1 Hereford genetics for decades. They covet the uniformity, consistency and predictability it offers their commercial customers.

4 years old at calving because they cull at least 30% of the herd each year. That stems from their belief in genetics and how to turn the wheels of genetic progress faster.

Along those same lines, Mark remembers one of the first things Gino taught him was to focus on the bottom end first. As you elevate the bottom end, the top end takes care of itself, Mark explains.

Each herd is bred AI for the first 20 days, all from natural heat detection. Then they turn bulls out for 40 days.

Lead with what you believe

Mark is one of those rare types that you meet and feel like you've known for at least twice a long spell. His ready smile and relaxed manner rightly suggest he's comfortable in his own skin and genuinely interested in what others think and why. It's also quickly apparent that he's a man of conviction and faith.

All of these characteristics came in handy during his four years on the AHA Board. After all, there are always unique challenges and opportunities.

For instance, while Mark served, the AHA Board adopted single-step genetic evaluation utilizing BOLT software. It provides higher accuracy expected progeny differences (EPDs) and enables weekly genetic evaluation. For many, the notion of EPDs changing because of the new approach was unsettling.

“Everything we do in life has unintended consequences, but looking back, it was the right decision,” Mark believes.

Via the dairy industry's earlier adoption of genetic selection tools, Pedretti Ranches was well acquainted with cattle genetic evaluation — what EPDs could tell you and what they couldn't — when the tools became available for beef cattle.

Although imperfect, every new tool offers the opportunity to craft genetics more precisely.

Mark remembers when using ultrasound to measure carcass characteristics was new in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

“We had to learn how to use the data,” Mark says. “Now we have genomic-enhanced EPDs for carcass traits and we have to use them.”

EPDs for udder suspension and teat size serve as other examples of Hereford breeders collecting and using data to elevate genetic selection. In both cases, what used to be breed weaknesses are now breed positives.

“You can never be satisfied. You always have to try to move forward,” Mark says.



This 2-year-old, a couple of days after having her first calf, is the kind of well-balanced, good-uddered and good-milking heifer Mark aims to produce.

Settle for the highest standards

During Mark's time in leadership, AHA also decided to make USDA Choice the minimum quality grade specification for Certified Hereford Beef®.

"We wanted *Certified Hereford Beef* to be recognized as a premium product. We felt it should be as good as Certified Angus Beef®, " Mark explains. "We felt like higher quality was the direction the industry was going and didn't believe we should settle for Select."

Making the decision meant reduced CHB volume during the adjustment period. Volume declined further when Greater Omaha Packing ended its relationship with *Certified Hereford Beef* because of the specification change — one of those unintended consequences.

CHB is clawing back customers and market share, though, even during the pandemic.

"If we look at the premiums commercial cattlemen made from CHB last year, the program paid for itself," Mark says. "Even though all of those dollars didn't come to *Certified Hereford Beef*, it made somebody money, and that's what we want. We've been able to sell more Hereford bulls."

If there was one thing he wishes every commercial cattle producer could know about the Hereford breed, Mark says, "There are some stereotypes that don't allow for all of the improvements we've made in the last 20 years. I don't want to be stereotyped by an image someone has of the breed from 20 years ago."

Although changing preconceptions is challenging, Mark points out, "Our biggest challenges are also our biggest opportunities. We

have opportunities to gain back market share, to change the image some have of Herefords."

Take advantage of opportunities

Image and preconceived notions also lie at the root of what Mark wishes every AHA member could know.

"Our board and staff have the best interests of the membership in mind in all that they do," Mark says. "That is the way they work, for the benefit of the breed and the Association. AHA Board and staff members are willing to talk to anyone."

Dallied to that same saddle, are realistic expectations of Association and staff responsibilities versus those of members.



Look at GB L1 Domino 177R (pictured here) or the painting of GB L1 Domino 804 on the Pedretti Ranches office wall, and you see timeless breed type and conformation.

For instance, Mark says, "I've got to sell my bulls, I can't expect the Association to sell them for me. Things the Association can do are things like providing genetic evaluation, maintaining purity of the breed, and identifying and researching genetic abnormalities."

Moreover, Mark encourages AHA members to get involved and use the tools and opportunities provided by the Association. He uses the Hereford Feedout Program as an example.

Pedretti Ranches sent 10 steers last year, which hit an industry homerun: average daily gain of 4.00 to 4.25 pounds, 90% Choice, made money.

"We were proud of the data," Mark says. "It's a great way to get feedlot and carcass data on a small number of cattle. If you don't do it or feed cattle on your own, you'll never know how they perform in the feedlot."

It was one of those deliberate steps on a long journey.

"How you live each day is how you live your life," Mark reminds. "You have to do it today. I think that's true of the Association, too." **HW**