



Markie Hageman, 2021 Beef Advocate of the Year is starting in the cattle business with Hereford genetics.

Share Your Cattle Story

Markie Hageman is the Beef Advocate of the Year

by *Wes Ishmael*

Navigating the trail between dreams of a career in fashion and agribusiness seems as circuitous as the path between having little knowledge about agriculture and beef cattle production to being one of its most effective advocates.

Markie Hageman, Hilmar, Calif., traveled both and was recently named the 2021 Beef Advocate of the Year. The award recognizes one outstanding advocate each year for success in educating consumers about cattle and beef.

Markie earned the award for creating effective social media content highlighting the benefits of beef production, the cattle industry and what it's like being a first-generation rancher. The Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program, funded by the Beef Checkoff, selects the award winner.

Girls eat beef, too

"I share my journey as a first-generation, beginner rancher on my social media platform Girls Eat Beef Too (GEB2)," Markie explains. "The name was inspired by my experience with waiters bringing food out and assuming I would order the salad or chicken and my fiancé would order a cheeseburger. This is absolutely false. I realized that beef tends to be thought of as a manly food, but women like me actually love and prefer red meat."

More specifically, Markie is known most on social media for her memes, which has evolved into

a language unto itself. Think in terms of readily recognized pictures and quotes (memes) or short videos (reels) with a caption conveying the author's message. She favors humor.

For instance some of Markie's memes aim at folks who know the industry, such as a picture from the movie, "A League of the Their Own," where the crusty retired male pitcher is berating one of his sobbing female baseball players with, "There's no crying in baseball!" Markie's caption: "An actual photo of my dad trying to teach me to back the trailer."

"Memes are a great bridge between those who aren't involved in agriculture and those who are," Markie explains. "I try to find a connection between pop culture and agriculture. I can share something that only ranchers really understand but the meme gives it more context to people who have never lived on a ranch. This helps everyone relate to my content no matter their background."

Finding the passion

Markie grew up in Tulare, Calif., an ag-bountiful part of the world noted for dairy production and the World Ag Expo. She grew up riding horses, showing pigs and sheep in 4-H, barrel racing and eventually becoming a rodeo queen. But Markie knew little about agriculture.

"It wasn't until I competed in and won the Woodlake Lions Rodeo Queen Contest in 2014 that I

realized I was really passionate about the Western way of life. My reign was a year full of communicating with people about my passion for the sport, cowboys and cowgirls,” Markie explains. “I realized I may have a knack for it. However, this was still a couple of years before I found the beef industry.”

In 2016, she moved to Auburn, Ala. with her mom, Jenny, and stepdad, Robert Britton. That’s when Robert went to work for Auburn University.

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— Markie Hageman

He also had a herd of commercial cows. “I attended a couple of cattlemen’s events in Alabama because my parents were involved and I wanted to meet people since I was new to the South. I used social media for personal reasons but never to advocate agriculture, because I didn’t really know agriculture needed advocacy,” Markie says. “I started posting photos of my stepdad’s cattle for fun and then found the Animal Agriculture Alliance College Aggies Online Contest. This is a contest that allows contestants to advocate on social media with weekly challenges and topics. I never knew how much people were against agriculture until I was part of this contest.” She placed in the top 10.

“Around the same time, I realized that I really loved learning about beef cattle and loved the people in the industry,” Markie explains. “I applied to the Young Cattlemen’s Leadership Program (YCLP) in Alabama and went through both the Beef Quality Assurance and Masters of Beef Advocacy certification programs. Most of the things I learned in both those certification courses were new to me.”

The experience led to Markie enrolling at Fort Hays State University in Kansas, where she graduated with an agribusiness degree. Moreover, Markie’s time in Auburn introduced her to Hereford cattle.

“When I lived in Alabama I used to drive by a pasture on the way into town. There was always this bull with a bald face and red body. I fell in love with him. Once I learned that he was a Hereford, I started researching different things about them. I read about their docility and great carcass quality, which rivals that of Angus. I also knew living in California in the heat of summer would be better for lighter hides,” Markie says. “I had people tell me that I needed to focus on black hides to be successful in the industry, but, as someone who didn’t even know much about beef cattle five years ago, I figure my story is enough proof that it’s time to change the status quo and not be afraid to show how other breeds can compete with Angus. The worst thing we can do in life, and in the industry, is settle and not seek change.”

Markie’s first cow purchase was three Hereford-cross heifers in 2020, after she returned to California. She added a purebred Hereford heifer last year. All are AI-bred to Hereford.

Start with folks you know

Markie continued her MBA education as a Top of the Class participant and was recently named as one of the first 10 students to the new Trailblazers program, which advances participants’ advocacy ability with tools and training needed to promote beef to new audiences while addressing and correcting myths.

“Start with your family and those closest to you. You’d be surprised how many people you know who don’t understand the agricultural industry,” Markie says. “I think it’s important to start in our smaller communities. Those are the people you already have a relationship with. They see you as a person and not some awful meat eater.”

Conviction matters plenty, too.

As a young woman, Markie says, “I’ve had some people tell me I don’t have the experience to be an advocate for the industry. As a first-generation rancher, I don’t know everything, but that’s why my voice is as important as anyone else’s.”

Given her starting point and the deliberate choice to get started in the cattle business, it’s easy to argue that her voice carries more weight with the consumers she’s trying to connect to the cattle business.



Markie Hageman (center) with her mom, Jenny, and stepdad, Robert Britton, received her award during the 2022 Cattle Industry Convention in Houston.

“Anybody can be an advocate for the industry if they are passionate about beef and cattle,” Markie says. “Those are the people who will help bridge the gap between the industry and the consumer.”

“Our industry lacks in the advocacy department. There are a few big names and not enough fresh faces and voices. We have such a diverse industry without even realizing it and my perspective speaks to people in different ways than someone else’s, so the more people who can be better, stronger advocates, the more hopeful our future as an industry will be. We need to get louder because anti-animal ag organizations and people are not afraid to share their opinions and misinformation and are trying to drown us out.” **HW**