

Think and Lead



Hereford Seedstock Academy forged powerful ideas and connections.

by *Wes Ishmael*

Gather a small group of like-minded individuals dedicated to the Hereford breed, folks who are already well-traveled and accomplished.

Provide them information and insights from others who are among the top professionals in other industry sectors.

Then stand back and watch the creative energy ricochet like foxfire among the group.

That's what happened at the first Hereford Seedstock Academy.

"The instant connection among the individuals in the inaugural class, their obvious passion for the breed and their willingness to share and engage was phenomenal," says Shane Bedwell, American Hereford Association (AHA) director of breed improvement and chief operating officer.

The four-day academy took six young Hereford breeders from the board room to meat retail, from pasture to feedlot and to cutting-edge research in three states. Along the way, they heard insights from each industry sector about the needs of the sector and how Hereford fits.



From the feedlot to the boardroom, the Hereford Seedstock Academy covered lots of ground in a short period of time.

Stretching the context of experience

"Being a young producer in the breed, this is a really important time to get a broad perspective on what the industry is doing as a whole and all of the different dynamics within the Hereford breed," says Jacob Rausch, Rausch Herefords, Hoven, S.D. "That way, when I'm back home at my operation, I'm taking all of those things into consideration. I'm not getting tunnel vision or pigeonholing myself. It's going to create an opportunity for more success."

Heading into the experience, members of the inaugural Academy class emphasized their focus on Hereford's role and opportunity within the commercial cow-calf business.

"I think one of the most important things is the momentum we have as a breed right now," says Shayne Wiese, Wiese and Sons, Manning, Iowa. "It's undeniable that the F1 black baldy is catching attention and garnering a premium. That's really

exciting to me. And, it tails into what I as a breeder need to do, and that's a better job of marketing. Mark Core led the discussion about marketing your own brand and the Hereford breed as a whole, trying to balance that.”

He's referring to Mark Core, Vermeer Corporation executive vice president and CMO, who shared his expertise with the Academy class about identifying messaging and customer service that earns and keeps customers. He led them through determining their own individual strengths and opportunities to improve.

Bedwell emphasizes the week's curriculum was intentionally designed to provide participants tools and information to benefit their operations, their customers and the Hereford breed (see Broad and Deep).

“It is a really great learning experience, not just for what we can do better every day, but how we can think through things and make things better for the long term,” says Emilee Holt, recently with NJW Polled Herefords, Decker, Mont., and now the AHA's western field representative. “The Seedstock Academy multiplied a normal learning experience by 10. The people you were surrounded with multiplied that times another five.”

Challenging the possibilities

“I come from the commercial side of the business, and I happen to raise registered cattle. For these young Hereford breeders to grasp what's going on every day in the commercial part of our business is huge,” says Bill Goehring, AHA president. “These young leaders had the opportunity to delve into key facets of each commercial sector during the week and what that means to their operation, their commercial bull customers and the breed.” Goehring and his family raise Hereford

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— Jack Ward, AHA executive vice president

seedstock, run commercial cows and operate a sale barn near Libertyville, Iowa.

During the academy, participants heard from leading commercial cow-calf producers, stocker operators, cattle feeders, beef packers and technology providers.

“I'm really excited about the work we're doing as a breed and breed Association to capitalize on the breed's advantages in crossbreeding and the research we are doing to keep ahead of the



Douglas Olsen (4th from left), Olsen Ranches, Harrisburg, Neb., points out the features of recently installed individual animal water intake systems.



Learning more about the National Reference Sire Program was a highlight for all who attended the Academy.

curve when it comes to consumer concerns about sustainability,” explains Tyler Schultz, Sandhill Farms, Haviland, Kan. “I've been a part of a lot of different young stockman groups, but to have one with people in the same business as me is rare.”

Practical research

“My biggest takeaway is the impact we can make on the beef cattle industry when we make good, responsible genetic decisions,” says Breck Debnam, Innisfail Farms, Madison, Ga. “It's definitely been an eye-opening experience for me. Being able to interact with leaders in our industry — folks who are extremely talented at what they do — and then

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Breck Debnam, Innisfail Farm, Madison, Ga.



Keayla Harr, J & L Cattle Services, Jeromesville, Ohio



Emilee Holt, NJW Polled Herefords, Decker, Mont., recently named AHA western field representative.

deeper into specific tools and programs, such as accessing and utilizing performance data, breed communications and promotional assets, commercial programs and Certified Hereford Beef®.

“Growing up in the Hereford breed, you always know that the Association is there and have a general idea of what they’re doing, but you don’t ever fully realize the full extent of what is going on behind the scenes to promote and enhance the breed,” Harr says.

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“Something that I’m going to take back home with me is just a better understanding of what the focus is at the Hereford Association and some of the things that they really want to implement to help us as breeders and to help promote the success of the Hereford breed ... and equipping us with the tools to help our customers be more successful,” Rausch says.



Jacob Rausch, Rausch Herefords, Hoven, S.D.

bring those ideas back to the ranch is a priceless opportunity.”

A visit to Olsen Ranches, Harrisburg, Neb. — AHA’s mainstay test herd for the National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) — proved to be an Academy highlight as participants viewed firsthand the cattle and system integral to the breed’s genetic evaluation.

“Getting to see what we’re documenting and how that entire program works was incredibly beneficial for understanding it better and seeing how the program ties into our EPDs (expected progeny differences) and how we’re proving some of these young bulls and getting those accuracies,” says Keayla Harr, J & L Cattle Services, Jeromesville, Ohio.

Besides the cow herd and NRSP progeny at Olsens, folks also had an opportunity to see the foundation of several AHA research projects, from individual animal feed intake and water intake systems to how individual animal methane emissions are collected. This set the stage for a visit with Colorado State University and AgNext, where

participants learned updated results from the breed’s pioneering project to determine genetic relationships between specific greenhouse gases and cattle production traits.

Learning Association details

During time spent at AHA headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., the Academy class learned more about Association programs, including the breed’s *Strategic Plan*, core strategies and the tactics being implemented. They also dove



Tyler Schultz, Sandhill Farms, Haviland, Kan.



Shayne Wiese, Wiese and Sons Herefords, Manning, Iowa

Deliberate leadership

The Hereford Seedstock Academy — intended to be an annual event — grew from AHA’s *Strategic Plan*’s core strategy of building a pipeline of future leaders. The breed is second to none when it comes to providing education and leadership development to members of the National Junior Hereford Association. The Hereford Seedstock Academy builds upon this established foundation.

“The Hereford Seedstock Academy is the logical extension of the breed’s intentional leadership development, which is a key part of AHA’s strategic plan,” explains Jack Ward, AHA executive vice president. “Members of the Seedstock Academy have already established themselves as high-achieving individuals with years of committed Hereford seedstock production experience despite their young age.”

Along with Goehring, other AHA Board members participated in various phases of the Academy, sharing details about AHA’s organizational structure and the necessity to maintain continuity of strong, thoughtful leadership.

“We need to perpetuate the strong line of Hereford breeders that we have in this country today,” Goehring says. “This crew of young people is already ingrained in breeding cattle, marketing and selling and involved in so much of what the Hereford business is today.”

These young leaders’ opportunity to learn from one another was as powerful as the formal program. They swapped information about preferences for specific equipment, synchronization protocols and genetic trends within and outside

of the breed. They challenged each other with thoughts about how the current seedstock business model could evolve and about anything else cattle or beef related that comes to mind.

“It was really exciting to meet everyone else and get to know them and what they do for their operations. We’re also spread out across the country, and we are all focused on Hereford cattle, but our ideas and what we’re working to improve varies,” Holt explains. “It’s been great to talk to them and listen to our speakers about the things that we can do to continually promote the breed and improve the cattle that we work every day to raise.”

“As a young breeder it’s exciting to see what we can do to further improve this breed. It’s been really nice to branch off and see the different environments where people operate, but all come together and talk about the value of Hereford cattle throughout the United States,” Wiese says. “The connections alone, and the camaraderie have been outstanding. Also, getting a crash course into a lot of these Association programs is very, very helpful to me.”

By all accounts, the inaugural Hereford Seedstock Academy met and exceeded AHA expectations.

“The excitement from these young breeders’ perspective and what they’re doing in the breed and in their own operations is extraordinary. They’re excited about the future of the Hereford

business and that’s a credit to everybody that’s involved in this breed and Association,” Bedwell says. “They see the potential in this breed and have already enjoyed success, but they also see opportunities to grow commercial demand for Hereford and make the breed stronger. It was apparent that this breed is on a powerful trajectory with the talent that we have in this class.”

“You’re going to find them on the AHA Board; you’re going to find them

in industry. You’re going to find them in the top of the game, not just breeding cattle and selling bulls,” Goehring says. “These six young people, if you watch over the next five years, are going to explode into Hereford and into the rest of the business. It’s going to be really fun to watch.” **HW**



The inaugural Hereford Seedstock Academy class (from left): Tyler Schultz, Shane Weiss, Emilee Holt, Keayla Harr, Jacob Rausch and Breck Debnam.

Broad and Deep

Participants in the inaugural Hereford Seedstock Academy engaged with industry leaders from within and outside of the breed during the Hereford Seedstock Academy.

In-depth discussion areas and tours included: the breed’s National Reference Sire Program (NSRP) at Olsen Ranches, Harrisburg, Neb., the breed’s mainstay NRSP herd; visits with leading commercial cow-calf producers, stocker operators and cattle feeders; insight to the pioneering AHA collaborative sustainability research project with AgNext and Colorado State University; Hen House Local Markets, a premier Certified Hereford Beef® retailer; leveraging individual breeder brands with the AHA brand.

Here’s a short list of Academy topics:

- Shaping the Future of the Hereford Breed
- Under the Hood of Breed Improvement
- A Historic Opportunity for Hereford Breeders
- The Certified Hereford Beef® Brand
- Sustainability’s Role in the Industry
- Developing a Customer Experience
- Adding Value to Hereford-Influenced Cattle
- Exploring Cattle Feeding

In addition to AHA staff, Academy presenters included:

- Gregg Barfield, BlockTrust Network President
- Robert Cannell, Ph.D., National Beef Chief Sustainability Officer
- Mark Core, Executive Vice President and CMO, Vermeer Corporation
- Mark Enns, Colorado State University
- Steve Gabel, Magnum Feedyard
- Jeff Gooden, Valley Oaks
- Mike John, MFA Incorporated Beef Marketing Manager
- Luke Lind, JBS Five Rivers Cattle Feeding LLC
- Bruce Mershon, Mershon Cattle
- Douglas Olsen, Olsen Ranches
- Kim Stackhouse Lawson, AgNext
- Nolan Stone, S= Cattle Co. **HW**



(From left) Douglas, Pam and Art Olsen, Harrisburg, Neb., hosted the Academy at breed’s mainstay NRSP herd.