



Renaissance Cowman

Jarold Callahan's industry experience recognized by the Saddle and Sirloin Club.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

Portraits of stockmen line the Kentucky Exposition Center. The likenesses of the industry's most outstanding livestock breeders, feeders, educators, marketers and evaluators make up the hallowed Saddle and Sirloin Club Portrait Gallery. Yet even in the country's largest portrait collection of its kind, one would be hard-pressed to find a single subject that touched as many facets of the industry quite like the 378th inductee — Jarold Callahan. Callahan is, by all accounts, a modern-day beef industry Renaissance Man.

"Jarold is just a special person and a tremendous leader who has served so admirably in many different areas," says Jack Ward, American Hereford Association (AHA) executive vice president. "Being involved in the commercial industry and feeding cattle, he is just as comfortable there as he is standing in the ring and slapping the champion of any breed. All of the success stems from a real love for the industry."

From the classroom to the capitol

Callahan's lifelong love for the cattle industry started humbly on his family's diversified farm near Welch, Okla. When he wasn't selecting feeder calves from the local sale barn for his family's stocker operation, Callahan was forging a reputation as a bright kid with a keen eye for livestock and a natural propensity for leadership. Throughout high school and college, Callahan remained at the top of his class and the top of many livestock judging competitions.

His knack for livestock evaluation and love of learning landed him in academia after receiving his bachelor's degree in animal science from Oklahoma State University (OSU) and a master's from the University of Arkansas. Callahan spent his first six years post-graduation at Northeast Oklahoma A&M College, coaching the judging team and serving as the animal science department head. During that time, he coached his junior college teams to wins at more than half of the contests they entered, and they never placed out of the top five before he returned to his alma mater. At OSU, Callahan built an equally impressive coaching record, standing behind three national championship teams and placing in the top five of 89% of the contests his teams attended over those nine years. Arguably more important, Callahan guided countless young people into the beef industry through his role as an animal science professor and OSU purebred beef cattle manager.

"Very few collegiate livestock judging coaches amassed a higher winning percentage than Jarold established during his coaching career. Furthermore, his winning teams yielded an extraordinary number of eventual beef industry leaders. This speaks to his mentorship and his broad and positive industry impact," notes Shane Bedwell, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement.

Callahan left academia and coaching in 1991, although he continues to be a noted evaluator and a nationally recognized judge. He chose to advocate for Oklahoma cattlemen at the helm of the Oklahoma Cattlemen's

(photo on opposite page) Jarold Callahan's likeness was added to the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery, a collection of paintings honoring the livestock industry's most influential leaders.

Association (OCA). For five years, Callahan made sure the capitol knew of the plights cattle producers were facing in middle America. Here, his natural leadership really shone, but so did his true love and understanding of the cattle industry. During this time, Callahan notably added both a foundation and junior association to OCA. As life often does, his experiences mingling with and speaking for cattlemen aligned Callahan for success in his next endeavor.

Express success

One of Callahan's favorite speeches to share at local Cattlemen's meetings was about the difference between a good bull and a great bull. Callahan would tell the crowd a good bull would breed cows, stay sound and stay in his fences without scaring Grandma, but a great bull did all of that while adding value to his calves.

This simple philosophy has long guided how Callahan selects cattle, and it serves as the cornerstone of his three decades at Express Ranches, Yukon, Okla. Callahan says cattle need to be sound, healthy, vigorous and fertile with good dispositions, but with the added performance the commercial cowman demands, whether that is in the pasture or on the rail. Added performance is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The ways commercial cattlemen profit from performance are often dependent on their environment, management style and the way they market their calves. Regardless of their operations' business model, Callahan and his crew at Express offer Hereford and Angus bulls that cover the basics and then some — great bulls with added performance for extra profit.

Jim Birdwell, owner of Birdwell Ranch and purebred livestock auctioneer, notes that Jarold has the type of cattle sense to know purebreds need to do more than hang banners; they also need to pass down the genetics so their offspring can hang profitable carcasses.

"You can't lose sight of the end product," he adds. "Jarold knows that what we produce in the seedstock business determines what the end product will look like."

While Express Ranches, the largest seedstock operation in the country, has done its fair share of winning, its bread and butter is and will always be selling bulls to commercial cattlemen.

"While their show deal is amazing, I believe Jarold's true love is selling commercial bulls," says Cindy

Pribil, owner of 4B Herefords and Jarold's past student and employee. "The volume of bulls they sell and the amount of 10-, 15- and 20-bull customers they have amassed are a testament to the quality, customer service and honesty of Express."

The fact that some of Express Ranches' high-performance genetics are also pretty enough to garner attention ringside or serve as front-pasture donors is simply a bonus. And it's truly been a bonus for young people in the cattle community. While Callahan has been at the helm in Yukon, Okla., Express has given junior exhibitors that have shown EX-branded cattle more than \$4.5 million to continue their education through their scholarship program.

Few seedstock producers have artfully melded genetic potential, real-world performance and sound phenotype quite like Express under the careful guidance of Callahan, and arguably fewer still have forged a team of long-term employees who work incredibly hard toward a common goal as they have for decades.



Callahan is just as comfortable sorting commercial stocker calves as he is sorting show cattle on the national stage. His diverse background provides him with a complete picture of the cattle industry.



Callahan, pictured with his wife, Jennifer, is most proud of his family despite his numerous achievements and accolades.

"I personally get to see his daily strive for excellence. Even after nearly 30 years working with/for Jarold, I still am amazed by his vision for the future and his ability to orchestrate and demonstrate the path to achieve that vision," says Mark Squires, Express Ranches vice president of administration. "Jarold has made a tremendous impact upon all in agriculture."

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Bald Faces at Express

While Express Ranches was long synonymous with quality Angus cattle, the Yukon, Okla., operation added Hereford genetics to better serve their commercial customers. Jarold Callahan, Express Ranches president, finds that black baldy cattle prove profitable for their commercial cattlemen.

“Commercially, there are advantages to a baldy female,” he says. “I think the crossbred female that fits this part of the world the best, in my opinion, is the black baldy. You get a bump in heterosis. You get a bump in breed-up. In a lot of operations, there is an advantage to running baldy cows.”

At Express, customers demand black bulls and Hereford bulls, and many of them are using their sires to capture that hybrid advantage.

“We can do a lot with genomics and EPDs (expected progeny differences), but yet we can do even more with heterosis. The Hereford-Angus cross is still the best cross for the commercial cattle market,” Callahan says.

Express emphasizes heavy-muscled Hereford bulls with plenty of pigment and added carcass merit to meet their customers’ demands, and they are impressed by the Herefords’ hardiness and docility.

“I like the way Hereford cattle handle. They’re a little better about going out and hustling for themselves,” Callahan says.

American Hereford Association (AHA) executive vice president Jack Ward notes that innovative purebred operations that keep the commercial cattlemen in mind, such as Express, continue to push the bald-faced breed forward.

“The beef cattle business is kind of like a pyramid; at the top of the pyramid are the seedstock producers. Their role is a little different than the next step because it influences the commercial producers and others down the line. At the top of this pyramid, you need to be challenged a little bit,” Ward says. “Jarold and the folks at Express Ranches are committed to using technology to provide their commercial customers with the best information they can to make genetic improvement. Commercial producers count on seedstock producers to do that for them. Jarold has taken this challenge head-on.”

Seedstock producers, like Express Ranches, that utilize all the genetic improvement tools available from the AHA, position their operations and their customers to accelerate genetic progress and herd improvement, which builds upon the profitability of Hereford-influenced cattle. **BA**

Giving back

While Callahan’s resume is impressive and covers nearly every facet of the industry, his record of giving back may trump it. Callahan has served in nearly countless capacities on behalf of the cattle industry from joining the Oklahoma A&M Board of Regents to presiding over the American Angus Association. With each role, he has leveraged his deep, introspective nature, his years of industry experience and his natural leadership to help these organizations make thoughtful decisions to ensure a better future for agriculturalists.

“I try to leave things better than I found it,” Callahan says. “If I serve on the board, I try to have a positive impact. You’re not always going to change the world. You’re not always going to fix everything. But I try to be a giver, not a taker. I try to give back.”

Callahan’s knowledge is given just as freely outside of board rooms, whether it is in the bull pen or

ringside. Those who have visited with Callahan undoubtedly learn something and leave the conversation feeling they have a new friend and mentor.

“Jarold Callahan is a cattelman just like you are. In his lifetime, his experiences have been profitable for him and his family, as well as for other breeders. When he speaks, you should listen,” Eddie Sims, National Cattle Services Inc., says. “I would encourage anybody, if they have the opportunity, to stop by and visit with him, even if it is just 30 minutes. They would find it exciting and refreshing.”

Callahan, for his part, always ensures the cattle industry has a way forward. When the National Western Stock Show had to change plans during the pandemic, Callahan helped lead the charge to create the Cattlemen’s Congress. But he is quick to point out that behind each of his contributions is a team of helpers and mentors, from his father to OSU mentor and fellow Saddle and Sirloin member Dr. Robert Totusek, to his current day Express Ranches crew — from Express Ranches owner, Bob Funk, to the ranch’s help sorting cattle.

“It takes a lot of good people to help you have any success,” Callahan says. “Whatever success I may be given the credit for, a lot of it’s due to the efforts of a lot of different people.”

Aside from all of his accomplishments and accolades, Callahan is proud of his family — wife, Jennifer, and his children, Brian, Tracie and Ryan — their commercial cow operation in Welch, and he still finds happiness and hope in every new calf. With every calf, there is hope, but there is also a challenge — one that Callahan relishes.

“I’ve been interested in all of the cattle industry, trying to be a student of all of it because whatever you’re doing, it’s changing. You’ve got to be continually learning, and I think that’s probably the beauty of it for me,” Callahan says. “You can never conquer it. You can get better at it, but we’ve never raised the perfect animal. We’ve never had a 100% calf crop or 100% breed-up. We’re trying to get there, but there is always room for improvement and change.” **BA**