

2024 NATIONAL HEREFORD QUEEN: HAPPY TO BE HERE

National Hereford Queen Marie Prodell is ready to represent.

by *Sydnee Shive*

As the announcer in Hale Arena listed the runner-ups and Miss Congeniality, Marie Prodell's heart rate was up, but it wasn't racing. She wasn't very nervous, thinking to herself, "I'm so thankful to be here, this is amazing, and my family's here with me." And then, her name was called.

The 2024 National Hereford Queen Marie Prodell's road to the crown has been anything but traditional, from purchasing her first Hereford heifer with her savings when she was 13 years old, to putting her aspirations of the crown on hold in 2020 when her family faced a health challenge.

In that moment, Marie was ready for whatever came her way.

"I have a great support system. I have a great family. My Hereford family is strong. I'm happy to be here and represent them. No matter what happened, I was just happy to be there."

Weeks later, she was still in disbelief.

"When they called me, I was in pure shock. It was a great moment," Marie says. "I was like, 'I cannot believe this is happening right now.' I'm still in shock."

"I just remember being filled with joy. I'm able to represent my breed in the best light, and I'm able to represent Wisconsin. Both did so much for me, and I get to be here and support them."

Age: 21

Parents: Jenny and Shawn Prodell

Siblings: Dillon Prodell (19)

College and degree program: Marie is a senior at the University of Wisconsin



– River Falls (UWRF), pursuing majors in agricultural business and animal science with a meat animal emphasis.

Extracurricular activities and hobbies:

On campus, Marie is president of the beef management team, where she works with a team of students to oversee and manage the university's Hereford and Angus herds. She also serves as treasurer of the Block and Bridle Club. Marie is the current president of the Wisconsin Junior Hereford Association. Some of her hobbies include hunting, watching hockey with her grandpa and working with her cattle.

National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) membership:

Marie joined the NJHA when she bought her first Hereford heifer in 2015. Since then, she has attended the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo, where she has

participated in a variety of contests over the years. She's active in her state association, and she's participated in the BOLD Conference and attended several Faces of Leadership Conferences.

Family history in the

Hereford business: Marie is a proud first-generation Hereford breeder. She currently owns MKP Cattle Co., an operation consisting of 15-20 cows and a small feedlot, with her parents in Algoma, Wis. She grew up showing Hereford steers at her county fair and purchased her first Hereford heifer in 2015.

"I went to my dad one day and I was like, 'Dad, I bought a cow,'" Marie says. "And he's like, 'What are you talking about?' I said, 'Well, I bought a Hereford heifer.' About two weeks later, we went down and picked her up. And that started our first experience in the Hereford industry."

Using her Hereford cattle, she's mentored 4-H members in her county, helping youth who didn't grow up in agriculture understand how to care for and raise livestock. She's a young entrepreneur, creating a powerful network with her Badger State Hereford breeders and state association. However, she's always had an affinity for cattle.

"I just love Herefords the most, they just represent me," Marie says.

Titles held prior to National Hereford

Queen: 2020 and 2023 Wisconsin Hereford Queen

When did your sights become set on the national crown? Marie first set her sights on the National Hereford Queen crown in 2020, when she originally planned on running. That same summer, her brother was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. Between a global pandemic, her brother's health and doctor's appointments, and keeping the farm going, Marie decided it would be the best for herself and her family to put aside her goal of running for National Hereford Queen.

"And it was a hard decision," Marie says. "I really wanted to run for National Hereford Queen, and I had a lot of support outside my family that were going to try to make it happen. But I knew in my heart that my family needed me to be at home during that time."

When she was provided another chance to be Wisconsin Hereford Queen in 2023 and run for the national crown, she took it.

"When I came in here, I just was like, 'I'm ready for this,'" Marie says. "This is something I really want. I'm passionate about this breed, passionate about this industry and it's something that I love."

Who inspired you to run for National Hereford Queen? Marie's family is her inspiration. Marie also has a passion for Wisconsin Hereford breeders, and she was fearful of letting them down. Her mom was the first to soothe her nerves.

"My mom would always tell me, 'No matter what, they're going to be proud of you. You are here, you came back and you're fulfilling your term. You're doing so many new things within the association. You're running programs, you're taking charge, you're making changes for the better; no matter what, they're always going to be proud of you.' All their encouragement and their support; it's what made me run for National Hereford Queen."

What advice do you have for future princesses running for the National Hereford Queen title? Marie says the best possible thing future National Hereford Queen candidates can do is be themselves, and not get caught up in the stress and anxiety of exams and interviews. She says to not be afraid of meeting new people and experiencing new things; you never know where your next lifelong friend may be.

What are your goals as the new National Hereford Queen? Marie's goal is to represent the breed in the best possible light she can. She wants to advocate for the Certified Hereford Beef® brand. She plans to share her non-traditional path to the Hereford breed and National Hereford Queen crown and use her story to encourage other first-generation Hereford breeders.

She envisions a webinar or program for young, first-generation farmers and ranchers, to learn more about the beef industry, maintaining a successful Hereford herd and fully utilizing resources from the American Hereford Association.

"I learned a lot in college, but what about the people who are unable to attend college or don't have the opportunity? Another outlet to be able to teach them about the industry itself, not only the Hereford breed but the beef industry as well, would be beneficial."

What makes the Hereford breed special to you? For Marie, the people are what make the Hereford breed special.

"Why the Hereford breed stuck out to me and why I love it so much is because I've met people that have not only grown my knowledge about Hereford cattle, but also helped me learn about the beef industry, too." Marie says. "It helped me find what I want to do for my career."

"It's all about friendships and friends that are willing to help you. And this industry is simply amazing. I love the people, and the people make me love the breed even more."

Describe your experience running for National Hereford Queen: Marie is grateful for her experience: running for National Hereford Queen. She enjoyed the weekend in Kansas City, connecting with new people and going through the selection process. She loved meeting and working with her fellow National Hereford Queen candidates.

"I just got to share my story. I'm thankful for the experience. I was able to meet so many influential girls from all different states and different breeders from all over the world," Marie says. "I really enjoyed the overall experience. When I got crowned, I was like, 'Man, this has already been a great week so far.' It's just the cherry on top." **HW**



Pictured (l to r) are: Marie Prodell, 2024 National Hereford Queen; Jalyn Davis, Kansas, second runner-up; Reese Pinkerton, Texas; Madison Maupin, Tennessee, Miss Congeniality; Madison Katzenberger, 2023 National Hereford Queen; Belle Westbook, North Carolina; Abby Johnson, Virginia, first runner-up; and Elaina Walsh, Illinois third runner-up.