

BEYOND THE BARN

Alabama Hereford breeder receives Bob Norton Excellence Award.

by *Sydnee Shive*

Randa Starnes, Fort Payne, Ala., was standing ringside and chatting with her family before the owned female grand drive at the 2024 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Her family had been adamant that she needed to be there to see the host of prestigious award winners named before the first heifer stepped into the ring.

Starnes listened as the announcer began reading a bio about a lifelong Alabama Hereford breeder that sounded an awful lot like her. She turned to her husband, John, and said, “Wait, are they talking about me?”

Then the second-ever Bob Norton Excellence Award winner hugged her family and went to accept the honor in the showing.

Honoring a legacy

Each year, the Bob Norton Excellence Award goes to a former NJHA member who shares Norton’s zest for life and embodies the phrase, “Care that comes full circle.”

“I’m just honored,” Starnes says. “Out of all the people they could’ve chosen, I can’t believe they chose me.”

Bob Norton was one of a kind and to know him was to love him. The late CEO of BioZyme® Inc. passed away unexpectedly on April 13, 2022. Norton was a long-time supporter of the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) and the JNHE. From hosting the NJHA board at his family home to serving on the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) board of directors, Norton was a believer in youth livestock organizations. Norton’s wife, Lisa, is a still an advocate for the JNHE.

“The Bob Norton Excellence Award is a special award. When Bob passed away, the HYFA board really wanted to do something special to honor his legacy at the JNHE. During his lifetime, he was so instrumental to the JNHE — our title sponsor is VitaFerm — and their flag still



Randa Starnes, Fort Payne, Ala., was this year’s Bob Norton Excellence Award winner. Pictured (l to r) are: Marie Prodell, National Hereford Queen; Katie Colyer, HYFA board member; Randa Starnes, 2024 Bob Norton Excellence Award winner; Kathy Buchholz, HYFA board member; Cody Jensen, 2022 Bob Norton Excellence Award winner; and Bill King, HYFA board member.

flies proudly at the JNHE each year,” says Amy Cowan, American Hereford Association director of youth activities and foundation.

Starnes is no stranger to the Hereford breed. The Auburn alumna grew up showing at the JNHE each summer, attending the first one in 2000. She now cares for a cow herd and maintains several businesses alongside her husband and their children, Harper Rose and John Owen.

“She is a leader in the industry,” Cowan says. “She has a humanitarian spirit, like Bob did.”

Hereford is where the heart is

Starnes’ daughter showed at her first JNHE a few years ago and was named reserve champion junior showman at the 25th anniversary. Her son will soon enter the showing for the first time. Like Norton, Starnes knows there are some lessons learned, and skills and connections cultivated, that can only happen in a barn or showing.

“When the HYFA board started this award, they really wanted it to go to a young person in the industry that grew up in the NJHA and is still very active,” according to Cowan. “Randa was a perfect choice because she’s raising her family in the industry, and she’s giving back as well.”

Today, Starnes owns three businesses with her family: Tennessee River Music (TRM) Inc., where they sell Hereford and Angus bulls and females; The Market at TRM LLC, a source for pasture-to-plate beef; and Lookout Mountain Genetics LLC, a custom bull collection facility.

“Agriculture is where my heart is,” Starnes says.

From conception to consumption, the Starnes family sees almost every facet of beef production through their Alabama ranch.

All of her family’s business ventures can be traced back to the JNHE, and years of caring for strings of Hereford cattle. Furthermore, TRM has been a steady supporter of the JNHE and HYFA for many years. Whether it’s been through scholarships for NJHA members or show sponsorships, the Starnes family has been there.

Starnes maintains a love for attending the JNHE and has passed a passion for the showing and Hereford cattle down to her daughter and son. Starnes hopes the Hereford breed and showing livestock will positively impact her children, just as it did her.

“Showing livestock is one of the best things you can do for your kids,” Starnes says. **HW**