Proven Trust

Tommy Coley retires after nearly 15 years of guiding Hereford breeders with his industry experience.

*by **Katie Maupin Miller***

Tommy Coley was 2 months old when he attended his family's inaugural Hereford production sale in the Tennessee hills. He spent his childhood helping manage their cattle, participating in 4-H and FFA and even made the winning nomination for Tennessee's first junior association president.

Tommy's favorite days would be when the Association's field representative would visit his family's operation. He and his cousins would scramble toward the pick-up truck praying they'd be the first one to clamber into the bed, so they could ride along through the pastures and open gates.

"I grew up thinking everybody had production sales," Tommy laughs, and with his front row seat to the seedstock industry he realized at a young age that he wanted to be a fieldman.

Eventually, Tommy would make his childhood dream come true when he joined the American Hereford Association (AHA) as the Eastern region field representative in 2011. But that opportunity came after a career immersed in the purebred business — raising, marketing, managing and judging Hereford cattle.

With their kids grown, Tommy and his wife, Kim, happily moved to a cabin on top of a Tennessee mountain, cleared away blackberry bushes and brambles and cleared their minds as they sipped coffee overlooking a Smokey Mountain vista so idyllic it rivals postcards sold through Appalachia.

The couple laughs that even the tightest-wound souls can find peace atop their mountain mecca. Yet despite travelling some 70,000 miles and spending more than 220 nights in hotels each year, Tommy never needed the mountain view to recharge.

"Work is not really work if you're doing what you love to do. The last 14 and a half years have been a joy," Tommy says. "I know every day when I get up that I'm going to see a friend."

Wisdom built on experience

Tommy's somewhat unique resume for a fieldman gave him a lifetime of knowledge to help guide Hereford breeders in his territory. His keen eye for evaluating livestock and years spent raising registered Hereford cattle, managing ranches, preparing show and sale calves and sorting stock honed Tommy's knack for marketing. It also ensured that he could relate to the breeders in his territory.

"The thing that separates Tommy from others is the fact that he has been around the block," explains Tommy Mead of Mead Cattle Enterprises, Midville, Ga. "He has been in every position in a purebred cattle farm. He has managed cow herds, run a show barn and been an owner. He has seen it. He knows what everyone is going through."

Consider his annual trek to the National Western Stock Show as an example. Tommy might be one of the few fieldman who owned or managed cattle that won in Denver, judged there and then



Tommy Coley works the ring at the 2025 National Hereford Sale at Cattlemen's Congress.



A common presence at southeastern region shows and events, Tommy Coley went beyond checking tattoos and stamping papers.



Tommy Coley is a hallmark of the Hereford breed in the Southeast.

ultimately represented Hereford breeders as a field representative, working ringside, lining up junior cattle and all of the rest. His breadth of hands-on, real-world experience gave him a unique view of the seedstock industry, one that encompasses the entire horizon, rather than bits and pieces.

"That experience and institutional knowledge that he acquired over the years made him a good fit for the role. There is no substitute for actual experience," says Billy Ashe of Ashewood Farm, Selmer, Tenn.

Or as Martha Dixon of River Circle Farm, Hartsville, Tenn., simply states: "Tommy's knowledge of the Hereford breed is astronomical. He forgot more about it than I will ever know."

It isn't just his lifelong commitment to all aspects of the breed that helped Tommy excel though; it's also the skills he honed along the way. For example, Tommy picked up a film camera to take photos for a sale catalog when he managed Perks Ranch in Rockford, Ill. At the time, they had to take photos in the morning and hurry the film to one-hour developers over lunch.

Tommy's knack for taking photos helped countless Hereford breeders in the Eastern region. His know-how when it comes to preparing cattle, creating a picture pen and setting up each animal to get their best shot helped push his territory's marketing efforts to new heights.

Tommy spent a great deal of time helping breeders better understand not only how to improve their stock, but how to market them. The first few years in his role, he traveled with a prepared PowerPoint explaining how to select and prepare cattle for consignment sales. Countless breeders took their first steps toward actively marketing their Hereford cattle with Tommy by their side. His efforts paid off. Today, the region hosts more than 40 sales; when he started there were 18.

"He has had a profound effect on the genetic improvement of Hereford cattle in the Southeast," Ashe says. "Our state sale has been in the top five consignment sales in the country for several years. That is the result of the genetic improvement."

Good eyes and integrity

Those involved in the seedstock business will tell you that success depends on good marketing to make a sale, coupled with integrity to keep it. Each day, field representatives, like Tommy, walk a tightrope of describing sale cattle in ways that will garner interest, yet accurately represent them to prospective buyers.

"You can never mislead anybody," Tommy says. "It is not unusual for someone to call me about an animal in the sale, and I have to tell him that it won't work. It is a hard thing to do, but you have to."

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Kim laughed when she heard this, saying it's not too hard for Tommy because he has spent years being honest and forthcoming with breeders and buyers, both of whom trust him implicitly.

"I've had Tommy look at cattle for me that are being sold elsewhere, and he looked at a lot of cattle at our place for potential customers," explains Paul Bennett of Knoll Crest Farm, Red House, Va. "Here is a good set of eyes and a great, reputable guy that can give you a third-party representation of a bull. I always knew he would represent us as we would represent ourselves."

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>
> **— Tommy Coley**

Every person that chatted about Tommy remarked on not only his keen eye for evaluating cattle, but his even better knack for accurately describing them and helping buyers find seedstock that could move their operation forward.

"His eye for cattle is really, really good," says Gary Hedrick of White Hawk Ranch, Buchanan, Ga. "He won't recommend something that he doesn't think will work for you. He is honest in all his dealings. He helps people pick out cattle that they can use."

Bennett enjoys having Tommy around on sale day for another reason — he is a calming presence amidst a sometimes chaotic and high-stress day. Before stepping onto the block for their bull sale, Bennett always seeks out a little time with Tommy, whom he says always makes him feel good about what they're doing and the cattle their representing.

"He is a really good person to be around when things are really stressful," Bennett notes. "He is the type of person who can focus on the big picture and not get caught up in the moment."

Mead echoes those sentiments, noting Tommy's even-keeled temperament, whether they're in the picture pen or working a sale.

"He keeps me grounded," Mead says. "He is laid back; you can't get him flustered."

Friends like family

Outside of Tommy's useful experience, marketing know-how and even-tempered approach to life, Hereford breeders most appreciate his friendship. Many people already knew Tommy from his years growing up in the business, while others met him for the first time through his role with the AHA. Either way, all of them talk about the genuine connection he makes with each person he meets.

"Tommy is the type of guy that will call just to say, 'I haven't talked to you in a while my friend,'" Mead says. "He took his job way beyond its responsibility and put his personal touch and friendship into it."



At one of his final cattle shows, the 2025 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo, Tommy Coley was recognized by the AHA for his service to the Hereford breed and its people.

To Mead, Tommy is synonymous with loyalty and dependability. Mead's mother's final wishes included Tommy serving as a pallbearer. When she passed, he drove many miles to honor her wishes while keeping his sale obligations to other AHA members. For Mead, that kind of commitment highlights the type of man Tommy is — one who has been through his own struggles but uses them as an anchor for kindness and a deep sense of commitment to his friends, family and peers.

Ashe appreciates how Tommy asks about his family after every honest and frank conversation they have about Hereford cattle. Dixon notes Tommy treats every junior member he comes across like they're his own grandkid, rather than a passing showman.

When visiting about Tommy, many also mention Kim, who means as much to Hereford breeders as him, since she often travels with him to sales and shows.

"Kim has become a staple in the Hereford family, just like I am, they look for her," Tommy notes.

"I just remember to thank God for the opportunity," Kim says. "Tommy and I are best friends."

The couple is known for working together, like when they hosted Hereford on the Mountain for a decade. Originally, the duo invited Hereford breeders in their territory to a local restaurant as a way of growing fellowship among producers and thanking the Hereford family for their support. Soon though, the event stretched beyond the walls of the small-town café, and the Coleys hosted it at their Tennessee home. At the last event more than 250 guests from 15 states attended, including the governor of Tennessee.

"Tommy is the greatest fieldman that I've ever had the privilege to work with. I don't see how he does it, but he loves it. He is so passionate. He has always kept going," Dixon says. "It doesn't matter if you have a big operation or two cows. He treats everyone the same."

"He goes above and beyond expectations to take care of his constituents," Hedrick adds.



Hereford breeders in the Southeast will miss Tommy Coley's steady presence on sale day.



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Grateful

Tommy and Kim hope to spend more time visiting their 11 grandkids and two great-grandkids. Most of their children are still involved in the agricultural industry. So, as peaceful as their mountain home is and as much as Kim would like to keep closer tabs on her flower garden, the couple will still be traveling to visit their Hereford family, in part because Tommy will still be picturing cattle for select sales. Also, he recently accepted a role as vice president of marketing and sales for Sale Day. The position will allow him to spend more weekends at home and work remotely. Or, as some joke, Tommy and Kim will only have to travel to a sale on a Saturday if they really, really want to.

As Tommy hangs up his hat as an AHA fieldman, he hopes all of the breeders in his territory realize that he does so with an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

"I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have done this," Tommy says. "They will never know how much it means to me to play a small part in the Hereford history of the Southeast." HW