

Lessons That Last

by **Lauren Gatz**

The National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) has been a constant for me in a season of life that has been anything but constant.

When I was elected to the NJHA board, I was heading into my junior year of college at Kansas State University. During my three-year term, I have graduated from college, transitioned to a full-time job and moved to a new city. Through all the change, the NJHA has remained steady. It has been a place of growth, a source of support and a reminder of where it all started.

Looking back, I realize my time on the board has shaped me just as much personally as it has professionally. The lessons I've learned along the way are the ones I will carry far beyond my years as a junior member.



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Leadership is about the people

Serving on the NJHA board has allowed me to see our organization from multiple perspectives. One of the most impactful experiences during my time on the board came while serving as membership chair, where I worked alongside Harlee Watson to reimagine how we connect with our junior members beyond the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

When we set out to rebrand the Pen-to-Pen program into the NJHA Meet-Up Powered by Sure Champ®, our goal was simple — better serve the needs of our juniors and create meaningful and accessible ways for our members to engage. That experience taught me leadership isn't just about continuing what we have always done, but also being willing to adapt, collaborate and think differently when it benefits the people you serve.

It also showed me the value of industry partnerships and the role they play in strengthening opportunities for youth in agriculture. The support from Sure Champ allowed us to take this idea and turn it into something that could have a lasting impact.

Growth happens outside your comfort zone

If there is one thing the NJHA has consistently done, it's pushed me outside my comfort zone.

Whether it was leading BOLD Conference workshops, speaking in front of large groups or building connections with juniors at events across the country, each experience challenged me to grow in my confidence and ability to lead. Not every moment felt easy, but each one was necessary.

Through those experiences, I learned the importance of showing up, even when you're unsure, and trusting growth comes from being willing to try.



Lauren Gatz, retiring leadership chair

The people who made it possible

None of my experiences would have been possible without the people who make this organization what it is.

To Amy Cowan, Bailey Clanton and Chloé Durian: thank you for your leadership, support and the example you set for us board members. Your investment in our breed and its members does not go unnoticed.

To our advisors, thank you for your guidance and the countless hours you invest in the success of our board. To my fellow board members, both past and present: thank you for the friendship, teamwork and shared commitment to our juniors and strengthening this organization.

And to my family, thank you for being my constant support system and for encouraging me to pursue every opportunity this organization has offered.

A foundation for the future

The Hereford breed has given me more than I could have ever imagined. It has shaped my path, influenced my career and ultimately led me to where I am today. My passion for agriculture and the beef industry is rooted in the experiences and opportunities I've had through this organization.

As I look ahead, I'm excited to continue building a career in agriculture and to give back to an industry that has given so much to me.

Serving on the NJHA board has been an honor I will never take for granted. While this chapter is closing, the lessons, relationships and experiences will stay with me long after the chapter ends. **HW**

Stepping with Confidence

by *Harlee Watson*

Do you remember where you were three years ago? Three years ago, I was preparing to make one of the most influential decisions of my life. I knew I wanted to serve on the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board, but I didn't know when the right time would be. I was a high school junior, and I had heard comments that made it sound like my age would be a disadvantage.

I knew deep down that leadership is not defined by age, but commitment. I understood the responsibility, and I cared deeply about the juniors. I chose to run and forgot about perfect timing. The opportunity mattered more. Looking back now, I am grateful I didn't let hesitation or doubt hold me back.

To every junior who has ever questioned whether they are "ready," I hope you realize you do not need to wait for the perfect moment or for universal approval. If you have the passion, ethic and heart, you are ready to step forward. Sometimes the right time is the moment you decide to believe in yourself.

Lessons learned

Serving on the NJHA board is a commitment. It's a balancing act between school, work, travel and service with professionalism and grace, even on the days that seem hard. It's also laughter in the barns, new friends and the pride that comes with watching others step into their confidence for the first time.

One of the most meaningful lessons I learned is that leadership is rooted in intentionality. It is not

about being the loudest voice in the room, but the most thoughtful. It's about listening before speaking, understanding before acting and recognizing the best ideas often come with time and patience. Leadership is measured not by how many tasks you complete, but by how many people you empower along the way.

This year brought a new lesson during my term — choosing your impact. Leadership provides countless opportunities to influence others, but it also asks you to decide how you will show up, what you will stand for and who will be around you. Throughout the challenges and triumphs, the board became a source of strength for me. They carried me through long days, difficult decisions and moments when life's weight felt heavy.

This year, the board guided me through the tremendous loss of my dear friend, A.J. Farrow. He was the kind of person whose presence made every room brighter. He led through kindness, humor and making people feel valued. His passing reminded me the relationships we build are not just connections; they are legacies. A.J. showed me, without ever trying, that the most meaningful impact we leave is often found in small moments of compassion and the way we treat others.

To the people who made this possible

As I reflect on my time in the maroon jacket, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the people who shaped this experience. To my fellow board members present and past: thank you for your collaboration, friendship and shared commitment to this organization. We navigated challenges, celebrated victories and grew together in ways I will always value. To Amy, Bailey, Chloé and the advisors: thank you for your guidance, patience and belief in our potential. Your leadership is a model of professionalism and purpose.

To the NJHA members, thank you for inspiring me with your enthusiasm, curiosity and willingness to step outside your comfort zone.



Harlee Watson, retiring director

You are the reason this board exists, and watching you grow has been the greatest privilege of my term. To my family and friends, thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement and love. Your belief in me made every step of this journey possible. To A.J., thank you for reminding me what truly matters — kindness, connection and living with a full heart. You continue to guide me.

As I retire from the NJHA board, I do so with a full heart and a renewed sense of purpose. This organization has shaped me into a stronger leader, more intentional teammate and more compassionate person. My time on the board is ending, but my commitment to the Hereford breed and its youth is not. I look forward to supporting this organization in new ways and cheering on the next generation of leaders as they step forward with confidence and vision. **HW**

A vertical advertisement for Sullivan Supply. At the top, it says "COMMITTED TO HEREFORD" in white and red text on a dark background. Below that is the Sullivan Supply logo, which consists of a stylized "S/S" in a red and white box with the tagline "The Advantage" underneath. To the right of the logo, the text "SULLIVAN SUPPLY" is written in large, bold, white letters, with "Livestock Grooming Supplies" in smaller white text below it. At the bottom of the ad, it says "Industry Partner & Official Show Supplier of the NJHA" in white, followed by the phone number "800-475-5902" and the website "WWW.SULLIVANSUPPLY.COM" in white.