Teeing Up the Future

NJHA directors elected.

National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members elected four new directors during the 2026 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), "The Hereford Masters in Madison." The new NJHA directors received their maroon jackets during the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) Scholarship, Award and Maroon Jacket Ceremony July 9. State delegates chose these young leaders to serve a three-year term on a team of 12 directors who govern and serve the organization's more than 4,200 members.

After giving their retiring addresses, chairman, Salem Sifford, Goldvein, Va.; vice chairman, Sam Birdsall, Torrington, Wyo.; leadership chair, Lauren Gatz, Fairview, Kan.; and director, Harlee Watson, Flemingsburg, Ky., retired from the board and handed their maroon jackets to the newly elected directors. The four new directors are Aidyn Barber, Channing, Texas; Amberlyn Christenbury, Starr, S.C.; Rhett Lehman, Sullivan, Ill.; and Matalyn Martinson, Elk River, Minn.

In addition to the four newly elected board members, the 2026-2027 NJHA officer team consists of chairman, Rylie Meinhardt, Onaga, Kan.; vice chairman, Matt Bruns, North Platte, Neb.; communications chair, Maddie Weaber, Wamego, Kan.; membership chair, Kendall Boatman, Rockford, Ill.; fundraising chair, Emma Ballinger, McKee, Ky.; and leadership chair, Sarah Beth Callicott, Only, Tenn. Also serving as directors are Jordan Mitchem, Vale, N.C.; and Gavin Rhode, Stewartsville, Mo.

Newly elected NJHA directors (l to r): Aidyn Barber, Matalyn Martinson, Amberlyn Christenbury and Rhett Lehman.

Newly elected directors

Aidyn Barber is a fifth-generation Hereford breeder from Channing, Texas, with a deep-rooted passion for the agricultural industry. The daughter of Brett Barber and Nicole Lowers demonstrates her lifelong commitment to the breed through her years advocating for its youth. Barber most recently served as the Texas Junior Hereford Association president. A highly competitive livestock exhibitor, she was named the 2025 JNHE champion senior showman. Barber is currently a student at Texas Tech University pursuing a double major in animal science and agribusiness with a focus in communications. She aspires to earn a graduate degree in agricultural law. Having participated in foundational leadership events, like the Building on Leadership Development (BOLD) conference, Barber is eager to use what she's learned to give back to the association. Her platform focuses on welcoming new families, mentoring younger members and preserving the rich legacy of the Hereford breed.

Aidyn Barber hugs her sister after being elected to the NJHA board.

Retiring director Salem Sifford helps Amberlyn Christenbury don her maroon jacket.

Amberlyn Christenbury, the daughter of Mike and Jennifer Christenbury, hails from Starr, S.C. She is an aspiring agricultural communications professional and a passionate advocate for the farming community. Currently a sophomore at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) majoring in agricultural communications with an agribusiness minor, Christenbury serves as the vice president of member engagement for ABAC's Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) and an Agriculture Future of America Ambassador. With a proven track record of youth leadership, including serving as president of both the South Carolina Junior Hereford Association and Crescent FFA, she has earned prestigious accolades, such as the South Carolina Outstanding Junior Award and national FFA proficiency honors. Christenbury's ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between consumers and producers by using digital platforms and strategic storytelling to promote

Rhett Lehman embraces family after receiving his maroon jacket.

Newly elected NJHA director Matalyn Martinson hugs retiring director Harlee Watson.

transparency and education across the agricultural industry.

Rhett Lehman is a sophomore at South Dakota State University (SDSU) pursuing a major in biology with a pre-veterinary focus. The Sullivan, Ill., native hopes to become a large animal veterinarian. The son of James and Erica Lehman demonstrated his steadfast commitment to the livestock community as an Illinois Junior Hereford Association (IJHA) member. Lehman has served as both IJHA treasurer and director over his eight years of membership. A seasoned participant in youth leadership events, Lehman has attended four NJHA Faces of Leadership and BOLD conferences, along with the NJHA Fed Steer Shootout Field Day. Driven by his passion for youth mentorship, agricultural advocacy and herd improvement, Lehman hopes to give back to the association that shaped him by fostering growth, connection and learning for the next generation of Hereford youth.

Matalyn Martinson, daughter of Krishona and Chad Martinson, was raised in Elk River, Minn., and has been an active member of the Minnesota Junior Hereford Breeders Association for seven years. She currently serves as the organization's secretary. A junior at SDSU majoring in animal science with a production management emphasis, Martinson maintains a rigorous academic and extracurricular schedule. She is the executive communications coordinator for the SDSU Little International, a Hayenga Undergraduate Research Grant recipient and a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship recipient, following her study-abroad experience in Australia. As the owner and manager of Martinson Herefords since 2019, she pairs her hands-on industry experience with a long-term goal of earning a doctoral degree in ruminant nutrition and becoming a university professor and researcher. Driven by a passion for youth mentorship and scientific advancement, Martinson looks forward to bringing her leadership experience from programs like BOLD to serve and uplift junior Hereford members nationwide.

Other directors

Rylie Meinhardt, Onaga, Kan., a junior at Kansas State University (K-State), is pursuing a degree in animal sciences and industry, with a minor in marketing. The 20-year-old daughter of Bryndon and Julie Meinhardt is actively involved on campus, serving on the student alumni board and participating in ACT, Block and Bridle, Agriculture Ambassadors and as a mentor in the animal sciences and industry program. With a strong interest in marketing and communications, Meinhardt combines her academic focus with hands-on experience in the beef industry. She is currently serving as Kansas Farm Bureau's communications intern, where her experiences include sharing *The Voice of Agriculture* through a podcast, articles and social media. She is especially passionate about developing leadership skills in junior members, just as past mentors and board members did for her. Alongside her siblings, she co-owns and operates Redwood Cattle Co., where they raise Hereford and Gelbvieh cattle. Meinhardt values learning from others and is deeply committed to building relationships within the Hereford community.

Matt Bruns, North Platte, Neb., the 22-year-old son of Kelly and Stacie Bruns, graduated from K-State with a degree in animal sciences and industry with an emphasis in livestock production and management. Bruns has a passion for the purebred cattle industry and is actively involved in the NJHA. He has exhibited at numerous JNHEs and held leadership roles at both the state and national levels. He plans to combine his interests in genetics, marketing and reproductive services to pursue a career in the beef industry. Bruns is grateful for the opportunities the NJHA has provided and is excited to give back to the organization, which has played a major role in his development. As a board member, he hopes to encourage younger members to get involved, build confidence and take advantage of the opportunities available through the Hereford community. His goal is to help juniors find their voice and grow into the next generation of industry leaders.

Maddie Weaber, Wamego, Kan., is the 20-year-old daughter of Bob and Tami Weaber. She is a junior at Oklahoma State University (OSU), majoring in animal science. At OSU, Weaber is an active member of Sigma Alpha, a professional agricultural sorority, serving on the recruitment committee. She is also involved in Oklahoma Collegiate Cattlewomen's Association and Block and Bridle Club. With a strong interest in beef production and genetics, Weaber is currently part of a beef genetics program — Crossing Paths Program — where she is learning valuable knowledge of the role of genetics in the beef industry and how to apply genetics on a practical level. She plans to take this experience with her as she pursues graduate school. As a sixth-generation Hereford breeder and 12-year member of the NJHA, she is proud to wear the maroon jacket as she represents the association. Weaber is grateful for her time spent in the NJHA, and she credits her strong passion for the beef industry to her mentors along the way. She hopes that during her time as an NJHA director that she can serve the youth in a way that encourages them to confidently grow into the next leaders of the beef industry.

Kendall Boatman, Rockford, Ill., is a sophomore at Lake Land College, where she's an agricultural transfer student. At Lake Land, Boatman is a member of the

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livestock judging team and an ambassador who is actively involved in the Ag Transfer Club and Collegiate Farm Bureau. Following her time there, the 19-year-old daughter of Tom and Tammy Boatman plans to transfer to a university to pursue a degree in agricultural business and communications. Boatman has attended every JNHE since she was born, and she has been a member of both her state association and the NJHA for 13 years. As a sixth-generation Hereford breeder, Boatman is deeply passionate about the beef industry and hopes to find a career where she can highlight the importance of the industry. Boatman and her twin brother operate 2TK Cattle Co., while also working alongside their family to manage Perks Ranch. Boatman's goal as a NJHA director is to inspire others to get involved, step outside their comfort zones and build lasting connections. She hopes to be a role model to juniors who helps them discover their passions and become confident leaders within the industry.

Emma Ballinger, McKee, Ky., is the 21-year-old daughter of James and Carrie Ballinger. Recently completing her junior year, Ballinger is studying agricultural education and advocacy at the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture at the University of Kentucky. Ballinger plans to use her degree to share her passion for agriculture with others and someday teach her students the value of agriculture. At the University of Kentucky, she is involved with the Collegiate Farm Bureau, the Ag Ed Society and the Singletary Scholars Cohort. Throughout her college career, Ballinger has worked for the Kentucky FFA Foundation, helping raise funds to impact the lives of future agriculturalists — highlighting her passion for introducing others to agriculture. As a NJHA director, Ballinger hopes she can help younger members find the courage to be involved and step out of their comfort zone. While she's wearing the maroon jacket, she strives to make others feel at home and welcome within the Hereford breed.

Sarah Beth Callicott, Only, Tenn., is the 21-year-old daughter of Claude and Lee Ann Callicott. She's a senior at Tennessee Tech University, majoring in agricultural education. Callicott plans to turn her passion for agriculture and the beef industry into a lifelong career, teaching and inspiring future generations of agricultural leaders. On campus, she's an active member of Sigma Alpha, the professional agricultural sorority, and she participates in the Baptist Collegiate Ministry. Callicott also works at a cow-calf operation, gaining valuable experience in beef production, genetic selection and cattle marketing. She and her family take pride in raising high-quality Hereford heifers in their operation and are honored to represent the Hereford breed. Wearing the maroon jacket with pride, Callicott hopes to inspire fellow Hereford juniors to find their confidence and strive to become the next industry leaders.

Jordan Mitchem, Vale, N.C., is a sophomore at North Carolina State University (NC State), majoring in animal science with minors in agricultural business and biotechnology. At NC State, the 19-year-old daughter of Wayne and Crystal Mitchem expands her passion for the beef industry, while exploring the diverse opportunities within agriculture. She spent her summer working at West Lincoln Veterinary Hospital. Mitchem has been a member of the NJHA for 11 years. She previously served as president of the North Carolina Junior Hereford Association and remains actively involved. Mitchem is deeply connected with her family's cow-calf operation, gaining hands-on experience and a strong appreciation for the cattle industry. She especially enjoys assisting with breeding decisions, as her family continues to develop their annual bull sale. In addition to cattle, her family is involved in fruit and row crop production, providing her with a well-rounded agricultural background. Mitchem and her sister, Regan, plan to continue their family's farming legacy. As an NJHA director, Mitchem hopes to challenge juniors to be intentional with their time, embrace opportunities and grow in confidence, leadership and passion for the Hereford breed.

Gavin Rhode, Stewartsville, Mo., is the 20-year-old son of Jeff and Susan Rhode. A junior at the University of Missouri (Mizzou), he is majoring in agribusiness management with a minor in animal science. At Mizzou, he is an active member of Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) where he has served as VNR activities chair and head director of the Mizzou AGR Classic Steer and Heifer Show. He is also involved in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources student council, currently serving as an officer, and he is a member of the 2026 University of Missouri Homecoming Steering Committee. Previously, Rhode served as Missouri FFA state secretary and Missouri Junior Hereford Association president. He has a deep-rooted passion for the beef and agricultural industries and looks forward to helping juniors grow, become more involved and step outside their comfort zones. HW

2026-2027 NJHA board of directors, front row (l to r): Aidyn Barber, Channing, Texas; Amberlyn Christenbury, Starr, S.C.; Jordan Mitchem, Vale, N.C.; Kendall Boatman, Rockford, Ill.; Emma Ballinger, McKee, Ky.; and Sarah Beth Callicott, Only, Tenn. Back row (l to r): Rylie Meinhardt, Onaga, Kan.; Rhett Lehman, Sullivan, Ill.; Gavin Rhode, Stewartsville, Mo.; Matt Bruns, North Platte, Neb.; Maddie Weaber, Wamego, Kan.; and Matalyn Martinson, Elk River, Minn.