Herefords in the Classroom

National Hereford Queen brings books about agriculture to urban students.

by ***Christy Couch Lee***

In our country today, a strong disconnect exists between many Americans and the farm. National Hereford Queen Lauren Wingler decided to bridge the gap with her service project this year.

Because of the generosity of National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members and families, Wingler will place about 500 agricultural children's books into the hands of urban students through her service project, Herefords in the City — Bridging Agriculture and Urban Classrooms. This project, conducted during the 2026 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Madison, Wis., involved NJHA members donating new or gently used books about cattle, farming or agriculture to help educate urban students about the origins of their food and fiber.

Seeing a need

Wingler's service project was inspired by her experience at the National 4-H Congress, where she participated in an inner-city classrooms project.

"Many of the students I met had never seen a cow or stepped foot on a farm, and they had very little understanding of where their food comes from," she says. "Yet, when I began sharing my story of growing up as a fourth-generation Hereford breeder, their curiosity quickly piqued."

Wingler says the connections built with these students impacted her the most.

"In those moments, agriculture was not about rural versus urban lifestyles. Instead, it became a bridge — one that connected students to an industry that touches their lives every single day, whether they realize it or not," she says.

Exceeding expectations

Wingler says NJHA members and families exceeded her expectations for the project. Books include storybooks, as well as some with lesson plans for teachers. She plans to deliver these books to school districts in Nashville, Tenn., and Atlanta, Ga., as the school year begins.

"I'm really just hoping that it helps them understand agriculture a little bit more," she says.

Wingler is encouraged by the overwhelming support.

"It really makes me happy that I've had so many people supporting me throughout this project," she says. "I didn't think that I would get as many books as we did at junior nationals. As well, people have been sending them in the mail, and I'm really grateful for them, too.

"Because of your incredible generosity, we collected books that will help introduce children to agriculture, the Herford breed and people who work every day to produce their food," Wingler continues. "What started as an idea has become an opportunity to educate, inspire and build connections between agriculture and students who may have never experienced life on a farm."

National Hereford Queen Lauren Wingler (left) hopes to educate others about agriculture through her service project, Herefords in the City — Bridging Agriculture and Urban Classrooms.

Wingler offers a special thanks to the NJHA, National Hereford Women, American Hereford Association, juniors, parents and advisors for their participation in and support of the project.

"Thank you for helping make this dream a reality," she says.

Continuing the movement

Wingler hopes NJHA members continue the spirit of the project in their communities. She encourages juniors to be advocates for the industry by sharing their stories, their backgrounds and the truth about agriculture.

"I hope NJHA members will share within their own communities, whether they live in a rural or a more urban area," she says. "I want them to know that if somebody says something bad about the ag industry, they can back up agriculture, while being respectful." HW