Bound Energy

Commitment powers Hereford Seedstock Academy.

by ***Wes Ishmael***

The Hereford Seedstock Academy is about both personal discovery and shared potential. It brings together like-minded young Hereford breeders and challenges them to consider what they know and imagine what is possible.

"Sometimes you can kind of feel like you're on an island. Being a seedstock person, you're really focused on your own place," says Braxton Butler, B&B Cattle Co., Virgil, Kan. "Coming here and getting to see all these people that are in the same stage of life and the same stage of their operation was really refreshing."

"I think being surrounded by these like-minded people fires you up and makes you want to keep going and believe in your breed," says Bell Ward, NJW Polled Herefords, Sheridan, Wyo. "These are the people who I'm going to be friends with and be peers with for the rest of our careers in the Hereford breed."

The fourth Hereford Seedstock Academy included eight members from seven states; each selected from a pool of nominations. Some are generational cattle and seedstock producers. Others are beginning to chart their family's history in the seedstock business. All have a deep stake in the business, are savvy and are already carving out respect in the business.

During the intensive four-day academy, participants heard from experts from across the beef supply chain to learn learn more about various sectors, such as the latest beef packing technologies and how large feeding organizations value cattle. They discussed breed improvement, from expected progeny differences and indexes to the value of genomics and American Hereford Association (AHA) research. They also got hands-on experience with AHA tools like MyHerd.

"There's lots of things and information out there that the Hereford Association has for us that maybe you don't know about unless you know where to go dig it up," says Shelly McQuaig, All Hours Farms and Barnes Herefords, Danielsville, Ga. "This whole academy really opened my eyes to a lot of that information and at least how to find it or how to pick up the phone and call somebody to get some more information about different programs and ways to market our cattle and build our customer relationships."

Define and separate

Mark Core, Vermeer Corporation executive vice president and chief marketing officer, began the week in Kanas City, Mo., at AHA headquarters with an interactive session about program branding and marketing.

"I think whatever you're the best at, that's what you should be known for. People should be able to naturally articulate what your operation's really, really good at," Core explained. "Go get what you're good at because there's a huge market out there, and you're a fraction of the opportunity."



The Seedstock Academy Class of 2026. Pictured (l to r): Shelly McQuaig, Barnes Herefords and All Hours Farms, Danielsville, Ga.; Colby Atchison, Four Diamond Livestock LLC, Manhattan, Mont.; Riley Bradshaw, Bradshaw Ranch, La Belle, Mo.; Jake Mundy, Whispering Winds Farm, Independence, Mo.; Joe Shaw, Shaw Cattle Co., Caldwell, Idaho; John Woolfolk, Woolfolk Farms, Jackson, Tenn.; Braxton Butler, B&B Cattle Co., Virgil, Kan.; Bell Ward, NJW Polled Herefords, Sheridan, Wyo.

2026 Hereford Seedstock Academy Graduates

- **Colby Atchison,** Four Diamond Livestock, LLC, Manhattan, Mont.
- **Riley Bradshaw,** Bradshaw Ranch, La Belle, Mo.
- **Braxton Butler,** B&B Cattle Co, Virgil, Kan.
- **Shelly McQuaig,** All Hours Farms and Barnes Herefords, Danielsville, Ga.
- **Jake Mundy,** Whispering Winds Farm, Independence, Mo.
- **Joe Shaw,** Shaw Cattle Co., Caldwell, Idaho
- **Bell Ward,** NJW Polled Herefords, Sheridan, Wyo.
- **John Woolfolk,** Woolfolk Farms, Jackson, Tenn. **HW**

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For those who struggle with marketing, Core explained the best place to start. "The magic is what you're going to say, not where you're going to say it," he says. "If you're not defined as to who you are, if you're not confident of that and you're not staying consistent with that message, we call it the shotgun approach in marketing … you're just shooting a shotgun and hoping something hits somebody, versus a rifle approach that's very focused."

John Woolfolk, Woolfolk Farms, Jackson, Tenn., thought the marketing session one of the most impactful parts of the Academy experience, in part because of the related discussion with his classmates.

"I feel like I learned just as much from talking to them about things they can do better, as they're things I think I can do better, too," Woolfolk says.

Colby Atchison, Four Diamond Livestock, LLC, Manhattan, Mont., also gleaned a lot from the marketing session, Core's expertise and the lively conversation with classmates.

"It was very nice to actually sit down and take a morning with somebody that's very knowledgeable in marketing," he says. "We can take his ideas back home and use them. I don't think the way marketing people think, so that was really insightful for me."

Genetics at work

Seedstock Academy members saw plenty of commercial Hereford and Hereford-influenced cattle, too. Visting the mainstay herd for the breed's National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) — Olsen Ranches Inc., Harrisburg, Neb. — has always been a highlight of the Academy experience.

"It's eye opening, just what the breed has been doing over decades and the amount of data they're collecting to better the breed," says Riley Brashaw, Bradshaw Ranch, La Belle, Mo.

Likewise, visiting Hermes Livestock in eastern Colorado a day earlier offered valuable industry insight. Some in the breed are familiar with Anton Hermes and his operation, which has a commercial cow herd, runs stockers and develops heifers for themselves and others. Harnessing maternal heterosis by building Hereford-sired F1 baldies is central to all they do for themselves and their customers. Hermes relentlessly measures his cattle's reproductive efficiency.

"We go and see those black and red baldies, and they look great," Woolfolk says. "Better management, better fertility equals more profit at the end of the day. And that's obviously a huge end goal for all of us."

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Shared knowledge

"Probably the most impactful part of the week, for me, was just getting to be one-on-one with other producers that are closer to my age and some of the more senior producers in the breed and getting to build those connections," McQuaig says. "Probably more information was thrown at us than I will remember when I get home, but I feel confident in being able to pick up the phone to call these people."

Gleaning insights from respected, Hereford breeders was one of the Academy highlights. These veteran seedstock producers included: Bill Goehring, Goehring Herefords, Libertyville, Iowa, and Keosauqua Sales Co.; Kevin Schultz, Sandhill Farms, Haviland, Kan.; and Dale Venhuizen, Churchill Cattle Co., Manhattan, Mont.

All of them opened their playbooks to the class about everything from breeding philosophies and hard-learned customer service lessons to leveraging genetic value and understanding market psychology.

Venhuizen left them with an inspiring challenge: "No matter what you do in your operation, how you want to raise them, what you want to raise or how you want to do it, if you build the right kind of cattle, and people value your relationship and they trust you, you'll be very successful."



Mark Core shares his marketing and branding expertise he gained at the helm of the Vermeer Corporation's marketing efforts.

Thinking and building

"It was really cool that all of us were about the same age, all had similar mindsets," says Jake Mundy, Whispering Winds Farm, Independence, Mo. "It helped us really kind of connect with each other and build us a foundation for our futures together because we're all going to be in this breed for the rest of our lives. Being able to have these close relationships like we have from this and being able to build on those friendships and possible partnerships, or whatever they are in the future, I think will be great for each one of our operations."

Learning from Leaders

Participants in the 2026 Hereford Seedstock Academy engaged with industry leaders from within and outside of the breed during the Hereford Seedstock Academy. In-depth discussion areas and tours included: the breed's National Reference Sire Program (NSRP) at Olsen Ranches, Harrisburg, Neb., the breed's mainstay NRSP herd; Hereford's value in the commercial sector at Hermes Livestock, eastern Colorado; visits with leading commercial cow-calf producers and cattle feeders; insight to collaborative AHA research, including projects with AgNext and Colorado State University; current insights to bovine congestive heart failure with Colorado State University; marketing and brand development; harnessing herd health and nutrition; and understanding how cattle feeders view profitability.

Academy topic included:

- Developing Your Brand and Customer Experience
- Telling Your Story with 1881 Creative
- Understanding the Role of the American Hereford Association
- Exploring and Applying MyHerd
- Under the Hood of Breed Improvement: Where Hereford Fits in the Industry
- Leveraging the Certified Hereford Beef® Brand
- Seedstock Success and Service to the Breed
- Marketing Hereford and Hereford-influenced Cattle
- AHA Commercial and Feedout Programs
- The National Reference Sire Program
- Industry Trends
- Hereford Research
- Protecting Herd Health in a Changing Landscape
- Exploring Cattle Feeding
- AHA Board of Directors Q&A

In addition to AHA staff, Academy presenters included:

- Jared Breining, Merck Animal Health
- Hampton Cornelius, AHA director
- Mark Core, Vermeer Corporation executive vice president and CMO
- Mark Enns, Ph.D., Colorado State University
- Bill Goehring, Goehring Herefords and Keosauqua Sale Co.
- Anton Hermes, Hermes Livestock
- Luke Lind, Five Rivers Cattle Feeding LLC
- Mike Louderback, National Beef Packing
- Douglas Olsen, Olsen Ranches, Inc.
- Kevin Schultz, Sandhill Farms
- Austin Snedden, AHA Board president
- Scott Speidel, Ph.D., Colorado State University
- Mike Thoren, Five Rivers Cattle Feeding LLC
- Dale Venhuizen, Churchill Cattle Co. HW



Anton Hermes explained how Hereford influence adds value.



Dale Venhuizen, Churchill Cattle Co., told the young producers that building industry relationships is one of the keys to success.



Douglas Olsen gave attendees a tour of the NRSP test herd.

The age range and small class size are deliberate components of the Academy design. The Academy is a key tactic for developing AHA leadership, which is a core strategy of its *Long-Range Strategic Plan*.

"One thing I can take back is all the different ways that we can do things," explains Joe Shaw, Shaw Cattle Co., Caldwell, Idaho. "The presenters talked about different ways to market and even different ways to talk to our customers. And a lot of my classmates talked about ways they've done things differently on their ranches. So, I think I can go back to the ranch with a little bit more confidence to maybe try a few new things."

"It's a great privilege that someone my age has to be around so many people that are older than them with lots of wisdom and lots of lessons to teach. Unfortunately, it's a seldom situation where I get to be around this many young cattle breeders, and in particular, young Hereford breeders that are all in the same place at the same time trying to accomplish similar goals with their life," Woolfolk says. "That would be my absolute selling point to anybody that wants to do this. Hey, everybody's from different parts of the country, but it's a real unique and rare opportunity to get to spend a week with people just in the same age group as yourself." HW

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