

The Hereford Game-Changer



Craig Huffhines has left a lasting impression on the Hereford breed.

by Julie White

A new horizon is before the Hereford breed, and the demand for Hereford genetics is as strong as ever. But as Hereford breeders move forward to meet the many opportunities and challenges head-on, they are saying a heartfelt goodbye to long-time leader and the face of Hereford, Craig Huffhines.

Craig, who spent 18 years at the helm of the American Hereford Association (AHA), announced his resignation in February as he accepted the position of executive vice president of the American Quarter Horse Association with offices located in Amarillo, Texas.

Originally hired in 1992 as director of feedlot and carcass programs for the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) program, he transitioned to CHB director in 1995, launching a fully aligned, breed-specific branded-beef program for the AHA.

Craig was named AHA executive vice president on Sept. 1, 1997, and under his leadership, the AHA has incorporated the Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program, which requires breeders to report every cow and calf, greatly strengthening the Hereford database. Craig's industry involvement has included serving as president of the National Pedigreed Livestock Council and chairman of the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) emerging technologies committee.

"Craig's leadership role has helped the Hereford breed gain more market share and he has definitely been very well in tune with CHB and that helped drive the bull market we have today in the beef industry," says Eric Walker, AHA president from Morrisonville, Tenn. "He gets along very well with people, which goes a long way in today's industry. It has a positive

influence on everything and his ability to translate the Hereford message to the cattle industry in general has really helped us."

The road to AHA

Described as a young man with knowledge and a work ethic beyond his years, Craig came to the AHA via his master's program.

"I first met him at Texas A&M University when he was president of the Saddle and Sirloin Club," remembers Gary Smith, Texas A&M department of animal science. "When I went to Colorado State University, I wrote a letter to Hop Dickenson, the AHA executive vice president at the time, telling him I thought the Hereford breed should develop a branded beef program. When the funding came, I couldn't think of anyone better to come and work on a master's degree and come and develop the CHB program than Craig."

He was soon recruited to Colorado State, where he completed his master's degree in animal science and developed a branded-beef program for the AHA.

"He was such a remarkably hard-working, pleasant and personable and easy person to work with and he worked so effectively with others that it was just absolutely two of the most wonderful years I had as a teacher to get to work with Craig," Gary adds.

"It went so well that Hop was convinced if they were to develop such a program, he needed to bring Craig along and actually hire him at AHA and get him to run the program," Gary says. "Hop did and the rest is history."

Changing roles

Craig worked five years for CHB until Hop's retirement in 1997, allowing Craig the opportunity to switch roles.

There have been three generations of Shaws that were privileged to know and work with Craig. I, personally, have known and worked with him from the time he finished graduate school and started with AHA in the CHB position to the present and have considered him a friend as well as a colleague. He has always shown great leadership and people skills, and we will miss him at AHA. Happy trails, Craig — we know you'll be very successful in your new position.

Greg Shaw, Shaw Cattle Co., Caldwell, Idaho, 2002 AHA president

Craig and I have become good friends, and I admire his ability as a leader to balance his job and his family with his spiritual life. From his start at the AHA, Craig understood that end-product merit and producing a product that the consumer valued were key to the long-term growth of the Hereford breed. But it is his balanced approach that sets him apart because he also understood that in the cattle industry, the needs of each individual can be different and even though he kept his eye on the end product, there are different ways to get there to keep producers profitable.

Through his leadership, the members of the AHA are experiencing incredible times. He was a voice for the Hereford breed for various industry groups including the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the Beef Improvement Federation, the National Pedigreed Livestock Council, the World Hereford Council and others. His knowledge of the industry and his ability to convey this knowledge to various groups kept the Hereford breed at the table as policy and direction were being implemented by the beef cattle industry. It has been my pleasure to be a colleague and a friend, and I wish him and his family the best as they move into this next chapter of their lives.

Jack Ward, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement

"1997 was certainly a transitional period in the Hereford business," describes John Dudley, AHA Board member from 1991-1997 from Comanche, Texas. John also served on the search committee during this time.

"We were still trying to regain our foothold you might say. Here we are in a situation with Hop, who had a long and distinguished career at the AHA, retiring. We had a lot of good things happening and we were also still going through the merger between the horned and polled Hereford associations and working to get things streamlined and launched in a new direction."

John says during this dynamic time, the Board was focused on positioning the Hereford breed to move on to a bigger and brighter future as it was looking for new executive leadership.

"It was a prestigious job and there were a lot of people interested in the job," he remembers. "Craig brought very fine academic credentials, excellent work experience and youthful vigor, energy and enthusiasm. And that was all very necessary. The purebred cattle industry at any level, whether it be headquarter staff or a breeder at home on the ranch, is all about sales. And sales is about people skills and anybody

It was a special privilege to chair the AHA Board search committee for a new executive secretary for our organization in 1997. The committee was unanimously impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge base that Craig Huffhines displayed. His knowledge of the beef cattle industry with a focus on efficient production directed at the consumer was especially appreciated, and his communication skill and vision for the future was impressive. We were confident he would carry forward a positive message for our organization. Rarely has the promise of youth coming to full fruition meant more to an organization. The AHA has been the beneficiary of the right decision at the right time. We are all indebted to him for his steady and progressive effort on our behalf.

R. Phillip Burns, MD, FACS, Burns Farms, Pikeville, Tenn., 1999 AHA president

that sits down with Craig Huffhines for a short or a long period realizes he has superb communication and people skills. I thought that was very important. He just rose to the top of people interested in the job and (he laughs) by God didn't we make a good decision."

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Craig joined the AHA staff after finishing his master's at Colorado State University (CSU). During his time at CSU, he was involved in the CSU Monfort/ConAgra Hereford study that lead to the development of the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) program.



As director of feedlot and carcass programs, Craig discussed the Genetic Outreach Program with Marvin Feddes, Manhattan, Mont., during a stop at Wm. R. Johnson's ranch in Lagrange.



In 2000, Craig and Mary Jon led the U.S. contingency to the World Hereford Conference in Argentina.



While serving as director of feedlot and carcass programs, he traveled the country working with feedlots and producers to help increase the demand for Hereford-influenced feeder cattle. Pictured here he is being interviewed at a Genetic Outreach Program field day.



Craig Huffhines has led our breed for as long as I remember being a part of the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA). Growing up very involved in the Hereford breed, I always looked up to the way Mr. Huffhines led and how he was so charismatic with everyone he spoke with. When I think back about the many times I had the chance to talk with Mr. Huffhines, he always greeted me with a handshake and was always interested in speaking about the different things going on within the NJHA and even with my current educational path. Mr. Huffhines was a great role model and someone I looked up to while on the junior board.

Brady Jensen, Courtland, Kan., NJHA chairman

The Hereford Breed has been fortunate to have great leaders, who, with their vision and direction, have kept the Hereford breed at the forefront of the beef industry. When I was chairman of the AHA Board, we saw an opportunity for a young Craig Huffhines to be our executive vice president and to move our breed forward. As close friends, we are proud for Craig, but as Hereford breeders, we will greatly miss his friendship and his leadership. He has always been very supportive of family operations and has had a lot of influence on our operation. We wish Craig and his family the best in their new venture. Craig Huffhines will always be a part of our Hereford family.

Glynn Debter, Debter Hereford Farm, Horton, Ala., 1998 AHA president

The face of Hereford

Mary Ellen Hummel worked alongside Craig for 14 years as executive assistant and a total of 25 years at AHA until her retirement in 2013.

“He was very young...he wasn’t 30 when he started,” she says. “But he navigated those early years well as the two associations were transitioning. He was always a people person who did well working in the industry. He was also really sharp and knowledgeable, always learning and always talking to people in the industry. He gained a working knowledge of everything associated with the Association in the years he led.”

As Mary Ellen observed Craig and his wife, Mary Jon, raising their sons, Seth, Cole and Miles she noticed their faith and doing the right thing were important. They were involved in their church. “He is a very upstanding man. He was also extremely caring for anyone

who went through a difficult situation. He has compassion for both employees and breeders. He was always available to the breeders.”

John says he knew once Craig settled into the job the Board had made a sound choice. “I could just tell from talking with other breeders and visiting with people involved with the Association, we were on the right track,” he says. “Craig is not only an effective leader, he is a good listener and he had a lot of innovative ideas to bring to the table. He was youthful and had all these great ideas, but he kept the rudder real straight and didn’t try to go too fast and in too many directions.”

As years went by, John says Craig’s leadership was key in the resurgence of Hereford popularity. “It’s a combined effort — the cattle, the breeders and buyers all have to get to the finish line at the same time, but effective strong leadership at the helm is real important, and he provided that.”

About the people

“He loves people,” Gary says. After learning he was moving to AQHA, Gary sent him an email, to which Craig responded: “I’m really going to miss the people at the AHA because that’s my family. The people that I’ve worked with on the Board all those years and in the leadership positions, and the people on

AHA hosted a breed-type conference in 2002. More than 300 Hereford breeders attended the event in Stillwater, Okla.



Craig had a way with Hereford youth. Here, he is congratulating Bailey McKay at the 2005 Junior National Hereford Expo in Milwaukee, Wis., after she was named reserve champion peewee showman.



From 2005 to 2008, AHA participated in at large-scale heterosis study in cooperation with California State University, Chico; Lacey Livestock; Harris Feeding Co.; and Harris Ranch Beef Co. Pictured here is the AHA Board visiting Harris Feeding Co. feedlot in Coalinga, Calif., in 2007.



Attending the 2004 World Hereford Conference in Australia was Dale Venhuizen, AHA president at the time, Craig and other AHA staff members, Stacy Sanders and Jim Williams.



Craig helped collect data on the first group of Lacey research calves in 2006.

Craig giving a pre-sale speech prior to a Nugget National Hereford Sale in Reno.



Craig Huffhines has been a strong, consistent, dedicated, resilient, high-integrity and high-energy leader of AHA and CHB for many years... but he is also approachable, collaborative, collegial and inspirational in his approach to breeders, Board members, AHA staff, industry partners, and past and present AHA youth. We have been blessed to enjoy his entire professional career to date.

The first “up close” exposure my wife, Judy, and I had to Craig and Mary Jon was during the World Hereford Conference in Argentina several years ago. We saw firsthand his excellent leadership skills and his outstanding ability in representing U.S. Hereford breeders. My experience working with Craig continued as I served several years on the CHB Board and attended AHA meetings, events, shows and sales. All along the way, Craig has been a strong leader through both the challenging times of the past and the exciting and dynamic times we enjoy today. Craig has also attracted a tremendous staff and provided the leadership and support for them, helping AHA persevere and then progress into the outstanding breed it is today. While a number of people should be recognized for the current success the Hereford breed is enjoying in my opinion, no one deserves more credit than Craig Huffhines.

Ed McMillan, industry representative, CHB LLC Board, Greenville, Ill.

Craig impressed me with his creativity. He arrived at the interview for the AHA executive vice president job with an ice chest of Hereford ribeye steaks. They were tiny. He felt the Association needed to address carcass issues and had ideas of how to do it. He was straightforward in discussing problems and innovative in solving them.

Craig took the reins of the AHA at a most difficult time. Breeders were still learning to work together post-merger. Finances were tight and the Hereford breed was rapidly losing market share. Craig accepted the challenge with enthusiasm and optimism. He eagerly supplemented his industry knowledge with principles of management and finance. He welcomed new ideas from staff and breeders alike. Some of the decisions forced by circumstances during his early tenure were extremely unpopular. Craig took the heat and was undaunted. Today, we as breeders are reaping the rewards of those farsighted, but difficult decisions made under his leadership. Recent sale reports are concrete evidence of his success as the AHA leader.

Jane Evans Cornelius,
Coyote Ridge Ranch, LaSalle, Colo.,
AHA Board of Directors, 1994-2002

our strong staff in Kansas City and all those people are just family to me and I’m going to miss them so much.”

Gary also says, “The other thing that has made him so strong is his wife, Mary Jon. She’s been so supportive of him and is a tremendous asset to him in everything he’s done.”

Eric adds, “We will miss his strong leadership and his ability to communicate with breeders. He can talk to the biggest breeder in the breed all the way down to the smallest breeder. He can communicate with anybody.”

Eric says Craig has been a champion for CHB for the past 20 years.

“The Association owes Craig a great deal of gratitude for his years of service. He has been a true Hereford friend, a face of the Association and we owe him a great big thank you. We also owe a great deal of appreciation to his wife, Mary Jon, and his entire family. I know he has a great opportunity with AQHA, and the opportunity he has opened for himself also opens the door for someone to step into his role here and lead the Association forward.” **HW**

AHA and CHB LLC hosted a journalist symposium during the National Beef Cook-off in Sonoma, Calif., on Sept. 22, 2010. More than 15 media professionals representing publications with a combined circulation of more than 12.4 million subscribers attended the event hosted at Kunde Family Estate Winery.



Craig was a true spokesman for AHA. Each year during the NCBA Cattle Industry Convention and other industry events you could find Craig being interviewed by media sharing our Hereford story.



In May 2014 AHA and CHB LLC staff hosted guests from the U.S. Meat Export Federation at the office.



Hereford breeders were challenged to embrace technology, focus on the customer, and concentrate on feed efficiency and end-product merit during the Hereford Genetic Summit Sept. 4-5, 2014. Nearly 300 Hereford industry leaders attended the event hosted at Missouri State University in Springfield, Mo.