



Pennsylvania Hereford youth traveling to the 2009 Junior National Hereford Expo in Tulsa, Okla., stopped at the Thompsons allowing the kids and cattle to rest after their long drive.

# Herefords & Kids

**Missouri Hereford breeders Bob and Gretchen Thompson are passionate about Hereford cattle and Hereford youth.**

by **Angie Stump Denton**

Nestled in the Ozark hills near Rolla, Mo., Glengrove Farm has been home to performance-tested Herefords for 35 years.

Bob Thompson is the third generation to farm the land, which was purchased by his grandfather in 1903. From 1926 to 1965, Glengrove was a registered Jersey dairy farm. In 1973 Bob and his wife, Gretchen, purchased their first Herefords, and the whiteface breed has grazed the Glengrove pastures ever since.

Through the years, the couple has worked together, managing



Bob and Gretchen Thompson chose to leave a legacy supporting Hereford youth and the next generation with an estate bequest to the HYFA.

and building their herd. Bob was in the banking industry for 37 years; he retired after serving 25 years as president of U.S. Bank in Rolla.

Gretchen says she enjoyed the opportunity to play an important

role with the cow herd during Bob's career. She assisted with everything from calving to artificial insemination (AI). Today, Bob says, he enjoys the opportunity retirement has given him to be a full-time Hereford breeder and travel to shows and sales.

## Why Hereford

Gretchen says while honeymooning in Colorado they first discussed getting into the cattle business. She recalls their discussion about the breed of cattle they'd purchase. "We both said Herefords. I liked their disposition and Bob had done research on the genetics and thought they were the breed of choice," she says. The couple purchased their first two bred heifers from Bob's uncle, Harold Berwick.

The original Glengrove breeding program was based on Victor Domino genetics. Bob says the herd today still has that influence because of the bloodline's ability to shed off and deal with the heat. "Victor Dominos are the optimum size cattle for our environment," he says. "We do try diverse genetics to attract different clientele. I'm not reluctant to add new genetics through the purchase of females or bulls that will work in our program or through AI sire selection."

Today the Glengrove herd numbers about 40 cows, including 20 spring-calving cows and 20 fall-calving cows.

## Breeding program

Bob says their breeding program is based on selecting for balanced expected progeny differences (EPDs) and producing cattle that work in their environment. They want females that will produce 40-50% of their body weight without a lot of supplementation.

"Bob is very knowledgeable about genetics and studies the data to make breeding decisions," Gretchen says. "Because of his dairy background, he also focuses on udder quality and soundness."

Prior to weaning, Glengrove bulls are creep fed and then after weaning are placed on a feed test that qualifies through the University of Missouri (MU) as a 140-day performance test. The bulls are fed to gain 3 to 3.5 lb. per day.

“We do not try to maximize growth,” Bob says. “We strive to develop bulls that are sound and useful for their new owners.”

Fellow Missouri Hereford breeder Marty Lueck says, “Bob is really focused on producing functional cattle that work for their customers.”

Bob and Gretchen, through the years, have adopted technologies to optimize their breeding program. The couple started performance testing through MU in 1975.

Today they continue to monitor performance for all traits included in the American Hereford Association Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program.

They also use embryo transfer and ultrasound technology and, most recently, started collecting residual feed intake (RFI) data.

“For years and years the trend has been to maximize outputs,” Bob says. “The efficiency work being done today with residual feed intake is the first attempt at addressing the cost of inputs. The GrowSafe technology allows producers to measure the amount of feed consumed and amount of gain. Hopefully this will allow us to identify cattle that are efficient at gaining weight.



The Thompsons performance test 10-12 bulls each year, focusing, not on maximizing growth, but developing bulls that are sound and useful for their new owners.

“This technology could have huge implications at addressing the cost of production. We’ve had both bulls and heifers on test at MU to help us identify bloodlines that are the most efficient.”

### **Marketing strategy**

The Glengrove marketing program includes an annual production sale, the Show Me Polled Hereford Classic, which is hosted with three other Hereford breeders in Sedalia each November. The couple also consigns to the Missouri Opportunity Sale and the Central Missouri Polled Hereford Association Sale.

The couple sells a few calves as projects to youth each year.

“We take great satisfaction in seeing juniors show cattle, learn life lessons and develop into responsible adults,” the couple says.

They also market 10-12 performance-tested bulls privately off the farm as well as consign to the Southeast Missouri Performance-Tested Bull Sale in Farmington.

Bob says Herefords topped the Farmington sale this spring. Bob and Gretchen consigned the high-selling Hereford bull, which sold for \$2,950.

### **Hereford success**

Bob says that in recent years it is exciting to see the Hereford breed have an increased level of

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Glengrove females are selected based on balanced EPDs, udder quality and soundness and are expected to produce a calf each year that weans at 40-50% of the cow's weight without a lot of supplementation.

acceptance by the commercial cattleman and gain prominence in the beef industry, especially because of the baldie.

"The Association and breeders are on target promoting heterosis and crossbreeding programs," Bob says. "Hereford is going to be a predominant player in the future of the beef industry.

"I've talked to numerous commercial producers during the last year who have asked about Hereford genetics and say they plan to use Hereford bulls now or in the immediate future," Bob explains. "I think this increased demand is due to the marketing done to promote that message about the value of heterosis and how it adds pounds of performance when you use Hereford bulls on Angus-based cows.

"Cattlemen are beginning to realize the black baldie cow makes a fantastic mother cow and black baldie calves give a commercial breeder lots of flexibility to sell at weaning or to retain ownership. There are so many options for baldies to produce profit for commercial producers."

### Helping youth

Both Bob and Gretchen have served on the Missouri Hereford

Association (MHA) board, and Bob was the group's president. The couple was recognized as the 2002 MHA Purebred Breeder of the Year and has been recognized by the Missouri Junior Hereford Association.

Marty says through the years Bob and Gretchen graciously have given of their time and money to support Hereford youth. "Although Bob and Gretchen do not have any kids of their own, they have numerous 'adopted' Hereford kids, who they have helped and cheered on for numerous years," he says.

Gretchen says they enjoy attending the junior nationals each year and watching Hereford youth excel at the event. "It's amazing how the kids get along so well with one another. They have learned personal skills and how to respect each other."

The Thompsons also open their home and farm to Hereford youth traveling to junior nationals. This past year Hereford youth from Pennsylvania stopped over on their way to Tulsa.

"There's nothing better than kids and calves," Bob says. "When showing cattle, youth learn responsibility, how to care for animals and learn the consequences if they do not. They

also learn about winning and losing as well as the basics of bookkeeping and financing."

Bob says he believes youth who are involved in programs such as the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) have a leg up in college and when they go out into the real world.

"Gretchen and I believe the Hereford breed is going to continue to increase in popularity, but to continue that growth, we are going to need good young people who will provide the leadership to keep the breed growing," Bob says.

Because of this passion, the couple has bequeathed a portion of their estate to the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA).

"When you start to think about how you might like your estate distributed, you consider organizations that you are passionate about," Bob says. "We love Hereford cattle and Hereford people, so the decision to bequest a portion of our estate to Hereford youth was an easy decision. We want to help with the process of developing leadership among Hereford youth to keep the breed growing in the years to come."

Bob says it is very important to do estate planning. "We all put it off and plan to do it someday," Bob says. "There is a great deal of satisfaction when the process is complete and you have determined how your estate will be distributed — knowing that state and federal laws will not dictate how it is distributed.

"The process is easier on heirs and family if you have a plan established. The bottom line with estate planning is that you know it is distributed the way you want it to be instead of the government making the decision for you." **HW**

**Editor's note:** For more information on estate planning, contact your attorney or search estate planning on the Internet. For information about HYFA, visit [HerefordYouthFoundation.org](http://HerefordYouthFoundation.org) or contact Amy Cowan at 816-842-3757.