



Stan and Brian on the right with a pen of three heifers at a consignment sale.



Stan, Craig and Brian (l to r) had the champion heifer and reserve champion bull at the Nebraska State Polled Hereford Sale in 1983.



The McMahon family hosts a stop on the 1997 Nebraska Polled Hereford Tour.



The McMaho ns exhibited the Champion Polled Hereford Heifer at the 2002 Nebraska Cattlemen's Classic in Kearney, Neb.



The McMahon family fits a heifer together at this year's JNHE in Grand Island, Neb.



The McMahon family pictured (l to r) are Mattie, Harrison, Daniel, Grady, Jill and Brian.

# Generations of Exhibitors

*Showing is a family affair and tradition for the McMaho ns.*

by *Allison Fortner*

**D**riving thousands of miles on hot summertime asphalt wore down too many trailer tires to count. Dozens of nights were spent on the road away from home and the farm. But the McMahon family enjoyed every moment of these experiences in pursuit of another great Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

The McMaho ns of Ayr, Neb., concluded three generations worth of showing Herefords at the 2015 JNHE in Grand Island, Neb., June 27-July 3. Fond family memories and hope for the future kept this family coming back time after time for a total of 27 junior nationals.

## Family history

The McMahon family began in the Hereford business in 1954, when Stanley and Janice McMahon started their herd and business, Stanley J. McMahon & Sons Polled Herefords. Brian and Craig, the "sons" mentioned in the business title, helped their father in the family Hereford operation, now known nationally as MCM Polled Herefords.

Though this was the McMahon family's first venture in the Hereford business, the family had been involved in the purebred livestock industry for the two previous generations, raising purebred hogs along with Shorthorn cattle.

A rich family history in livestock led to the continuous success of the business once it was dedicated to

polled Hereford genetics. When Stanley retired, Brian and Craig took over the Hereford herd and the farming operation.

### Second-generation exhibitors

However, continuing the family business was not the only legacy Stanley's sons would follow. During his show career, Stanley had exhibited cattle with the local 4-H program and at state and national levels, while he also worked for reputable breeders.

A second generation of exhibitors, Brian and Craig participated in Hereford shows during their youth, and that involvement led to the tradition they shared with their children.

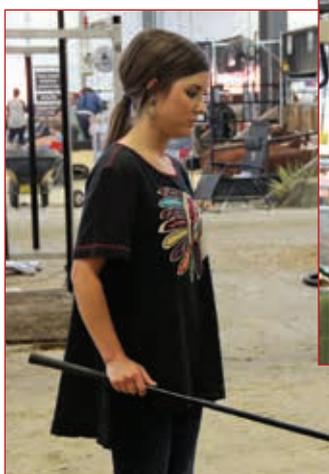
Brian recalls his favorite show as a junior was his final year when he traveled to Hutchinson, Kan., with his friends the Crayses and the Frenzens.

Craig says having Herefords has brought his family an abundance of pride, togetherness and fun. "I wouldn't change a thing," exclaims Craig, whose favorite memories include his daughter, Darbie, receiving champion steer, reserve champion showman and speech competition honors at the junior nationals.

With a strong family history of exhibiting Herefords, it is no surprise that Brian's four children have also embraced showing for the past 19 years. Brian and his wife, Jill, introduced their son Daniel to showing when he was seven years old at the Junior National Polled Hereford Show in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1996.

The three younger children, Grady, Mattie and Harrison, followed in the family footsteps by exhibiting Herefords as soon as they were old enough to show as part of the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA).

As the children grew older, preparing the cattle for shows became a group effort and everyone grew into their responsibilities of preparing cattle for the show. Jill recalls Harrison's



Mattie contributes as part of the family fitting team by keeping the heifer calm while she is in the chute.



Harrison uses the skills he has been building since his first show to fit his heifer in the championship drive of senior showmanship.

first JNHE, laughing, "I remember you were always sweeping the aisles, trying to stay busy."

### Family lessons

Though no family member claims a specific task in preparing the cattle for a show, it is evident that they all come ready to help. Through years of working together, they have discovered niches and talents that allow each family member to contribute his best.

Jill says through showing Herefords, her children learned teamwork, commitment and the importance of hard work by working together to prepare at home and at the shows. "And no



Grady (left) and Brian, the father and son duo responsible for the MCM herd, are also a fitting team for the polled heifer show.



Harrison concentrates on exhibiting his heifer during one of his final classes in the junior showing.

complaining about it either," she is quick to add.

Not only did they learn valuable life skills and the value of working together as a family, but their mother claims that learning to live together is part of what has built her family's spirit at the shows.

"That's what love is," says Jill, as she proudly watches her children band together to fit Harrison's heifer for the ring in the owned polled female show.

The McMahons tackle the challenge of managing cattle and fitting heifers by working as a family team. Though Jill and Brian's three eldest children no longer qualified to show at the 2015 JNHE, they journeyed to Grand Island to help Harrison prepare his cattle and to enjoy what has served as the family vacation for many years.

*continued on page 48...*

**“We’re pretty competitive among ourselves, but for one of us to win, we win as a family.”**

— Grady McMahon



Grady (at the halter) exhibited a class winner in the 2011 JNHE bred-and-owned heifer show.



Mattie took home the honor of Premier Junior Exhibitor at the 2013 JNHE in Kansas City, Mo.



Mattie shows at the 2013 JNHE in Kansas City.

...Generations of Exhibitors continued from page 47

### Awards and accomplishments

Harrison's last rounds in the junior showing made for a memorable week of accomplishments. He advanced to the top 10 in senior showmanship, was nominated as a junior herdsman candidate and won a division in the horned owned heifer show.

However, Harrison was not the first of his family to accomplish these impressive feats. Grady was also a herdsman candidate and placed in the top 10 senior showmen during his tenure as an exhibitor.

But the boys didn't have all of the success to themselves. One of the

most exciting years was the 2013 JNHE in Kansas City, Mo., where Mattie received the honor of Junior Premier Exhibitor. During the same week, the McMahon family collectively exhibited three class winners in a row, contributing to a total of five class winners and two division winners.

With the exception of one heifer in Harrison's first year of showing, the family has bred every heifer they have exhibited. This method has served them well, especially considering that each of the four children has exhibited a national class winner.

The family shares in their victories, celebrating together when anyone wins. "We're pretty competitive among ourselves," admits Grady, "but for one of us to win, we win as a family."

### More than winning

The McMahon family has had some impressive success at several JNHEs but values the way in which they have been able to show as a family over the success of their cattle.

Brian recalls that some of their best times have included excursions in the middle of the night to junior nationals with other families from Nebraska and Kansas.

With all of the flat tires, narrow bridges and not-always-convenient bathroom breaks that come along with the travels, the McMahons continue to be thankful for their experiences.

They agree that traveling across the country has contributed largely to the many memories they have made. While they may not be a family that stays at home often, they say that if they had not taken the opportunity to attend JNHEs throughout the years, they never would have driven the miles and experienced the varying cultures in the U.S.

From Michigan to Pennsylvania to Mississippi, the McMahons have had the joy of showing Herefords in different locations across the country, though the final show of the third generation concluded just 45 minutes from their home in Ayr, Neb.

### The homefront

However, it wasn't always as simple as driving less than an hour to arrive at a show. With all of the miles put on the trailers across the country, Brian is the first to acknowledge that the travel to shows would not have happened without the devotion of his brother and father.

While the family journeyed to shows across the country during key growing seasons, Craig and Stanley made sure that all was running smoothly at home in Ayr. From watching the Hereford herd to irrigating the corn and soybeans on the farm, the dedicated duo have helped put Brian's mind to rest as he carted his family to the JNHE each summer.

"There's no way this could have been possible without my brother and my dad being home," says

Brian, grateful for the kindness shown by his family members.

Having been involved in farming for more than 100 years, the family now grows irrigated and dryland crops of corn, soybeans and wheat.

The McMahons extensively use artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) in their breeding program to produce functional and genetically superior cattle. The family has worked to stay competitive in the showring while producing cattle that would work in seedstock and commercial operations alike.

With multiple years of Hereford production experience, Brian says he has seen changes in Hereford type and how cattlemen select animals. He notes, "Frame scores have changed and moderation has become more of a standard in the breed."

He also recognizes that improvements in technology including expected progeny differences (EPDs) have altered how his family evaluates cattle and makes breeding decisions. As a family, they work to be progressive and to incorporate advancing technologies to improve their herd genetics.

MCM's marketing program has been private treaty sales year-round, offering purebred herd bull prospects as well as commercial herd bulls, replacement females, and show heifer and steer prospects.

Doug Bolte of Blueberry Hill Farms, Norfolk, Neb., has been doing business with the McMahon family for more than 35 years and has seen the operation succeed in both the showring and at the farm. "Much of their success at the junior nationals is from home-raised, bred-and-owned females," Doug remarks. "That is quite an accomplishment for a modest-sized cow herd."

Not only has Doug done business with MCM and shared

## **"The McMahon family has left their imprint in the Nebraska Hereford Association as they have served as members and on the board of directors in all three divisions: men's, women's and junior's."**

— *Doug Bolte*

bulls with them over the years, but he says his family also shares great memories of summer vacations to junior nationals with the McMahons.

However, he is quick to recall the broad influence the McMahons have had in their state. Doug says, "The McMahon family has left their imprint in the Nebraska Hereford Association as they have served as members and on the board of directors in all three divisions: men's, women's and junior's."

### **The road ahead**

Though the 2015 JNHE brought the junior show career of Brian and Jill's children to an end, the family is confident that this does not mark a farewell to the junior nationals. "You know it won't be the last one we'll attend," Jill assures.

They plan to stay involved in both the NJHA and the American Hereford Association and to continue in their offering of superior genetics for junior exhibitors to utilize. MCM Polled Herefords will host its first "No Holds" online steer and heifer sale in November. "We've got some pretty exciting prospects," Brian says.

They'll be selling some top prospects this fall, and the McMahons are excited to travel to Madison, Wis., in 2016 for

another exciting event, though they may not have cattle in tow as they have in the past.

As the third generation of McMahon showmen grows older, the four former exhibitors are headed for success in their chosen fields.

Daniel, 27, obtained his law degree from Creighton University and is an attorney at a firm in Hastings, Neb.

Grady, 26, purchased Craig's share of the cattle and runs the farm along with Brian. He also assists in fitting cattle and plans to stay involved in the Hereford business.

Mattie, 24, will marry her fiancé, Tyler Humphrey, in September and move to Dixon, Ill. As Mattie prepares to start a family of her own, she says she would encourage her children to show in the future. She and her fiancé were both raised in the show industry and are impressed with the way the Hereford association handles its shows and activities.

Harrison, 21, has started his career as a John Deere mechanic in Fairfield, Neb.

The future looks bright for a fourth generation of McMahon Hereford exhibitors to grace the showring. The family tradition remains strong despite the fact that the third generation of McMahons has made its way out of the junior arena.

Though the nights on the road may have come to an end for the time being, there is no question that the McMahons have left their mark on the showring and will continue to influence the show arena and Hereford community through their business and their passion for the Hereford breed in the future. **HW**