

## **Wearing the Boots**

**Article Submitted by Kaitlyn Hinds, 2010 Tuscarawas County Beef Queen**

Many of us have done it a million times. You realize it's time to feed and go to the basement or the mudroom to put on chore clothes: the old, ripped jeans, the paint-stained shirt, the bib-overalls, the ugly, faded, jacket, and the final layer, the mud-covered boots with yesterdays manure still sticking to the bottom. You pull, tie, buckle, or tighten them onto your feet, and then you grab the door handle and begin your trip to the barn. Although every person in this beef industry is remarkably different, each has at least one thing to tie us all together, our boots. We can all be connected by our footwear.

The average beef producer is in the industry for either the reason of loving the industry and it being a hard, but rewarding, hobby, or in the business to keep himself and his family fed. Many may have both of these factors behind the structure of their operation. For many, this industry is mostly for enjoyment purposes. They have fun putting on their show boots, competing in the show ring, and producing cattle that will produce stronger, thicker, more functional bloodlines in the future. They enjoy competing with their cattle. Many then pass this tradition on to those younger than themselves, as well. Children, siblings, cousins all continue this tradition on into the future. The industry becomes promoted to the public in a very positive way, especially when youth are involved. Non-agriculture based people see cattle be groomed, fit, and presented in positive ways at different fairs. Show heifers, then, begin producing calves and these calves are bred to become tomorrow's brighter future.

The other side of our industry is more one of survival. These producers breed for cattle that will help them live. They put on their boots to bear the feed lots and pastures. These cattle are produced with the sole job of being payment towards the producer's future. They are not producing, for example, "hairy" cattle for the show ring. They want a heifer that will become a well-functioning cow. They need a cow that is a good mother and can care for her calves on her own because this type of producer doesn't have labor intensive time. And the producer is striving for cattle he can sell as quickly and inexpensively as possible. These cattle's purpose in life is to produce or be good, strong, fast growing cattle. The calves can then be fed out in feed lots and sold with a seal of high quality Pure American Beef. These are the production cattle of our time.

The argument that arises, though, is the question 'is there a *right* side to be on this industry?' The appreciation of the words quality verses quantity can be used here. The show side is looking for strong, well-bred, cattle for their future herd, higher quality, but they'll take smaller sized numbers until this can be reached. On the other hand, commercial operations are looking more to the production side; cattle that maybe aren't as fine tuned, but can be produced much more quickly to reach the industry standards.

While this question could be debated deeply with pros and cons to both sides, the truth is the beef industry needs both sides now and for the future. While showing and raising cattle in the show ring, we are making bloodlines stronger and working more towards the *ideal* calf all the time. As we move toward this goal, we are promoting the industry to the public. This shows the public a positive perspective and promotes them to buy the hamburger and T-Bone steaks at the supermarket. But in order to have the mass amounts of beef for the consumers, we also need faster produced beef product. Without the slower way of breeding, we begin to see less functional cattle, and without the production animals, we would see the number of bovines drop. Both types of breeders are wearing boots, but each with ones to serve slightly different purposes. Two sides of producers exist in the United States beef industry today.

On this final note, I ask you to consider your life as a beef producer, as well as an advocate. Are you living to serve the industry the most ideal animal? An animal that may take longer to breed for, but would be more ideal to the industry? Once you reach this type of animal, you change into show boots and get to work? Or are leaving your boots on to go feed a larger herd of hungry cattle? Or are you doing both at the same time? Either way, you are putting on your boots to promote a proud and strong industry; one that needs feet and footwear of all sizes working together.