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Handzel Leads Cattlemen in Membership Drive

By Sarah Young, Livestock Editor



In his first year as president and sixth on the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association (WCA) Board, Hank Handzel is leading the charge on a WCA membership drive.

The Hereford producer from Cottage Grove, wants to bring "Wisconsin's best kept secret" to the forefront, and what better time to kick off the drive than July Beef Month.

Born in New York, Hank has come a long way to lead the WCA. He was just 11 years old when he was introduced to cattle.

His uncles owned farms, located near Buffalo and Niagara Falls and he would help out when needed. They raised both Polled Herefords and Angus, but Hank truly enjoyed the Hereford breed the best.

"I always wanted to be a farmer," Hank says. Having the opportunity to make hay and do chores was enough of a memory to stick with him through the years.

He purchased his current 176-acre farm by buying 38 acres in 1985 and added to it by about 40 acres at a time. He then began his Hereford cow/calf

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operation in 1988. Currently the Handzel homestead is home to 50 cows on 70 acres of rotational grazing. The other acres are used to grow hay, corn and oats. Four cows in their herd were recently recognized by the American Hereford Association ("AHA") as Dams of Distinction, which, according to AHA, are among the "most efficient cows in the Hereford breed."

Hank's wife, Charlotte, can be found helping on the farm, gardening, and looking after the couple's active dogs. Charlotte and Hank have four grown children Shary, Megan, Laura and Nathan n all who helped out, showed animals and helped with hay.

"If you like farming after doing hay you must be crazy," he says.

Before coming to Wisconsin, Hank attended college in Buffalo, N.Y., majoring in accounting because his parents wanted him to go to college and "you're supposed to have a career".

While in college he found his other calling, law, during a business law class.

"One of my classes for accounting was business law and I got interested in law," he explains.

His interest and test taking ability landed him a full ride scholarship to St. Louis University in Missouri. Hank took general law courses and tried to decipher what specialty law area to pursue.

However, Hank's interest, environmental law, was not available, yet.

"A good friend of mine and I organized the first Earth Day at St. Louis University Law School," he explains. "As a result they had an environmental law class."

Hank became specialized in environmental law because of the lack of regulation.

"I thought there was a need for regulation," he says.

That thought blossomed into a full-time career at state and national levels. After graduating in 1971, Hank began work as an advocate for the environment.

"At that time everyone started focusing on protecting the environment," he says, recalling the miles of barren rivers because of some industrial discharges. He specifically remembers one case where a company's discharge turned part of the Mississippi River black.

"Those were the kind of things I didn't think were right," he says.

Hank's career began with the Illinois EPA as a staff attorney and then the manager of the air pollution Legal Section. During his time there, he helped to implement regulations on discharge into water sources and problems with acid mine drainage. He left the Illinois EPA for employment with U.S. EPA in the Region III office in Philadelphia. There he was a staff attorney working on cases in Pennsylvania, Delaware, West Virginia and Virginia. He was appointed as a special assistant U.S. attorney in West Virginia.

During his time in Illinois, Hank was assigned to a guard unit that had summer camps in Wisconsin at Fort McCoy.

"I was always impressed with the state," he says.

The good impression and a hint from a friend about a law firm position opening, brought Hank to Wisconsin and he's stayed ever since.

He was hired on at what was then DeWitt McAndrews & Porter in 1978 as both an environmental and general practice lawyer. When he started in 1978, the firm was comprised of 12 partners and six associates and through mergers, including the most notable merger with Ross & Stevens, today the firm DeWitt, Ross & Stevens is home to close to 80 lawyers.

He has seen a lot of changes over the years within environmental law.

"It's been incredible," he says. "When I first started there were very little rules, regulations and laws."

Now there are specialties within the environmental law practice since regulations and laws have become more prevalent and detailed. Some of the specialized areas include solid waste, air, and water; with many sub-specialists within those areas.

"The volume of rules and regulations is incredible," he says. "The rules are compiled in thousands of pages."

One rule was the reason Hank became closely involved with the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association n NR 151.

"I went to my mailbox on a Saturday and got this large package from the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association," he explains. "I was looking forward to opening it because I thought it was something about cattle production and it was a copy of the draft regulation that John Freitag sent me."

A note inside revealed the then Executive Director, Freitag, knew of Hank's background and wanted him to look over the couple hundred page document on behalf of a cattle producer's well-being.

"I felt like given my background I should," he says. "That's how I got involved on the board."

Hank went through the document, worked with members of the Association including Deane and Nancy Thomas, Terry Quam and Freitag, to provide comments on the initial draft.

"As I recall there were a lot of things that needed changing," he says.

Specifically he cites the pasture definition. The drafted definition of pasture would prohibit the grazing of corn stalks.

"That is something everybody does and is necessary," he says.

Hank credits the WCA for continuously being involved in legislative action and keeping the Cattlemen's best interest in mind.

"One of the most important reasons for you to join WCA as an individual member is to help safeguard your interests in the beef industry and as a property owner," says Hank.

The WCA has implemented "VOTERvoice" an easy, electronic way to help producers contact their state representatives or senators on issues impacting their operations' well-being. With the click of a mouse, producers can send e-mails to their respective representatives.

"The cattlemen really do a lot for the industry as a whole," he says. "They protect our interests no matter how big or how small."

This year the WCA has made it a goal to increase membership and become more active on a national front on legislative issues as well as state issues.

The Association offers educational opportunities at its annual Winter Conference. The conference offers sessions on topics for cow/calf and feedlot sectors as well as an opportunity to network with other producers and industry professionals.

The Association also works with the university and DATCP to develop programs to help producers. WCA is currently working with those entities and the Western Wisconsin Livestock Producers on developing the Badger Vac 45 program for feeder cattle.

The association along with the Wisconsin Cattlewomen's (WCW) provides scholarship for WCA or WCW members, or children of the members.

The all-volunteer WCA is working hard to "strengthen involvement" and become more "proactive".

But to be successful, Hank encourages all cattle producers big and small, to join the WCA.

"There are over 12,000 farms with beef cattle on them and we'd like to see them become members," he says.

This may be the best time to join, as a sponsor of WCA, Quality Liquid Feeds, has donated Badger football and basketball tickets as a prize for the drive.

WCA's Board has determined that these tickets will be used as follows:

- Two football tickets will be awarded by a drawing for all existing members of WCA who previously belonged to the WCA before July 1. This includes existing members who renew their membership after that date. The drawing will be held at the World Beef Expo near the end of September.
- Two football tickets will be awarded in a drawing only for new members who join WCA after July 1. This drawing will also be held at the World Beef Expo.
- Finally, the two basketball tickets will be awarded to the individual who is responsible for obtaining the most WCA memberships between July 1 and Feb. 1. These tickets will be awarded at the Winter Conference to be held in Tomah in February.

To have your voice heard and to join the WCA visit <http://www.wisconsin cattlemen.com> for more information or contact the WCA directly at 608-794-2400 or mailto:wisbeef@yahoo.com.

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