

N.C.H.C.A.

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The Highland HOOFBEAT

MISSION STATEMENT: North Central Highland Cattle Association shall protect the integrity and sustainability of the Highland breed by promoting education and social interactions of its members.

The Highland Gathering

Jamie Schulz reflects on the trip to
Scotland

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2026 Annual Meeting

Duluth is calling...read more

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Progress or Chaos?

Time to make a plan

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Maureen Matt President

Maureen has been an active member of NCHCA since 2020. A dedicated highland enthusiast with hands-on experience focusing on breeding healthy, quality animals, and beef production. She is passionate about giving back to the membership and preserving and promoting the grand old breed.

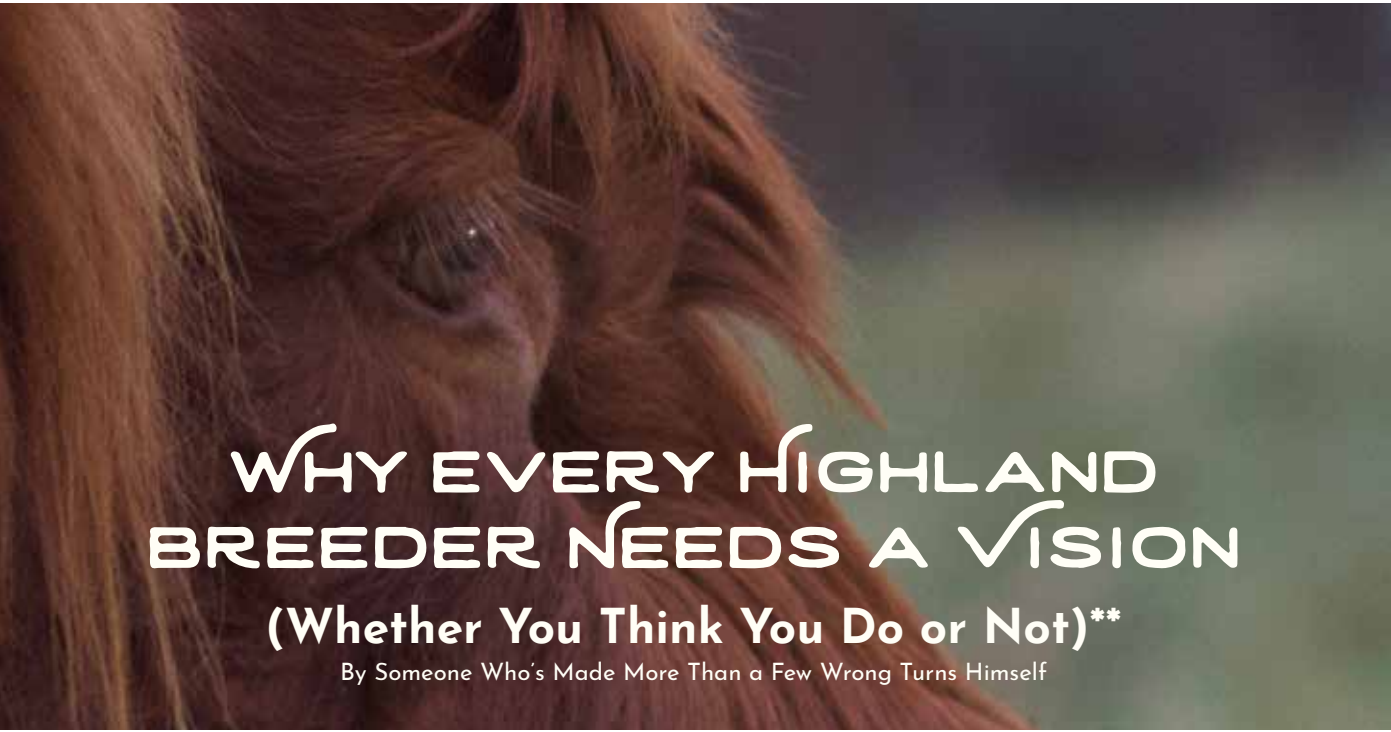
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Plan ahead – and help your farm's future flourish.

It's that time of year again—when the last leaves have slipped from the trees and, for many of us here in the North Central states, the first light dusting of snow has already made an appearance. I hope this fall treated you well, bringing in a strong harvest and keeping your cattle healthy. As we head into the winter months, I hope you find plenty of moments to slow down, warm up, and enjoy the company of family and friends during the holiday season.

This winter is packed with can't-miss opportunities for members to connect, learn, and celebrate with their Highland family and friends! Mark your calendars for January 23rd and 24th—the National Western Stock Show and Sale is in Denver, Colorado, and it promises to be one of the standout events of the season. With a stunning brand-new pavilion, top-tier exhibitors, and a vibrant community of Highland enthusiasts, this is the place to be. Whether you're showcasing cattle or simply soaking in the

(Continued on page 11)



WHY EVERY HIGHLAND BREEDER NEEDS A VISION

(Whether You Think You Do or Not)**

By Someone Who's Made More Than a Few Wrong Turns Himself

There's a moment in every Highland breeder's life—usually somewhere between patching a hole in the fence for the third time that week and wondering how a calf that fuzzy can also be that slippery—when you pause, lean on your post driver, and ask yourself:

"What exactly am I trying to do here?"

Some folks are lucky enough to have that moment early. Most of us stumble upon it much later, after the cows have already decided for us. The Highlands, bless them, are remarkably patient creatures, but even they appreciate a human with a plan. They'll never say so, of

course—Highlands are far too polite for that—but you can see it in the way they look at you. A slow blink. A sigh. The sort of gaze that says:

*"Friend, it wouldn't hurt you to have a goal."
And they're right.*

Because in this business of raising Highland cattle, having a vision for your farm isn't a luxury. It's the fence line between progress and chaos—the difference between building something and merely accumulating animals like a drifting snowbank.

Let's take a tour through the three most common visions we see today, and maybe you'll spot yourself somewhere along the trail.

1. THE GRASS-FED REGENERATIVE BELIEVER

"Soil first, cows second, sleep later."

These folks are easy to identify. They're the ones who get misty-eyed talking about soil microbes. They own more temporary fencing than socks. Their winter reading list includes books with titles like *Grazing Toward Glory* and *Zen and the Art of Composting*.

Now, don't get me wrong—this crowd is doing holy work. They're healing land, storing carbon, and growing beef on nothing but sunshine and optimism. But you'll know a

regenerative breeder by the way they talk about “rotations” as if explaining a military operation.

They’ve got metrics for metrics. Spreadsheets that have their own spreadsheets.

And the cows? Well, their sunshine powered daily gains are something to behold.

If this is your goal, wonderful. It’s noble. It’s necessary.

But it only works if you truly commit to it. Regeneration without a plan is just well-intentioned wandering.

2. THE SHOW-RING DREAMER

“Beauty isn’t everything—but it sure scores well.”

These breeders are a special variety. You’ll spot them at the fairgrounds polishing a horn tip with the devotion of a jeweler preparing a diamond for auction. They know every judge, every ribbon, and every rumor.

They speak in terms like “length of spine,” “capacity,” and “presence”—an elusive trait that no one can define but everyone claims to see. Their barns shine. Their feed bills loom. Their grooming

equipment could power a small salon.

And we need them.

“HAVING A VISION FOR YOUR FARM ISN’T A LUXURY. IT’S THE FENCE LINE BETWEEN PROGRESS AND CHAOS”

Because without show breeders, the breed loses its artistry—the visual reminder of what Highlands were meant to be. Their animals become the posters we tack on office walls and the photos that make the uninitiated say, “Now that’s a cow.”

But here’s the thing: the show-ring goal requires focus.

Discipline. A standard. A willingness to say, “Nice cow, but not for my program.” If you drift, the show ring will humble you swiftly.

Judges have a gift for that.

3. THE BEEF PRODUCER

“If it doesn’t hang well, what’s the point?”

These are the realists among us—straight-backed folks who care about ribeye area, carcass weight, butterfat, and briskets large enough to make a pitmaster blush. They’re here for efficiency, function, and cattle that earn their keep. Their favorite phrase?

“Pretty is fine, but performance pays.”

They admire good conformation, of course, but they admire good gains more. They track dressing percentages with the sort of enthusiasm normally reserved for football scores. When a calf performs well, they beam like proud parents. When it doesn’t, well... “There’s always hamburger.”

Beef breeders keep the breed grounded (pardon the pun!). They remind us that Highlands are heritage animals, yes, but also beef animals—cattle meant to feed families. Good beef doesn’t happen by accident. It takes selection, recordkeeping, and a willingness to make the hard calls.

Without a clear plan, your fridge ends up full of excuses instead of steaks.

(Continued on page 4)

SO WHY DOES VISION MATTER?

Because without one, you end up chasing every idea that trots across your pastures.

One year you want show calves. The next year you're passionate about carbon. Then suddenly you're buying a bull because someone on Facebook said he "throws color." Before long, you're running a herd that resembles a garage sale—interesting, eclectic, and confusing for everyone involved.

A vision is simply this:
a direction worthy of your time, your land, and your cattle.

And Highlands appreciate someone with a direction. They respond to it. Your breeding becomes intentional. Your culling becomes clearer. Your purchases become strategic. Your pastures—if they could talk—would thank you.

A vision doesn't have to be complicated. Just genuine.

It's the quiet voice that says:
"This is who we are. This is what we build.
And these are the animals that will get us there."

A FINAL WORD FROM THE HILLS

The cows will forgive your mistakes.
They'll tolerate your experiments.
They'll outwait your indecision.

But they thrive when you have a purpose.
So before the next calving season rolls in...
take a walk. A long one. For just a minute...
Think more about life than livestock.

Ask yourself where you want your farm to be in ten years.

Ask what type of cattle you want standing in your pastures.

Ask what makes you proud, not just busy.
Because once you decide on that vision—
grass-fed, show-ring, or beef-bound—
everything suddenly becomes simpler.

And your Highlands?
They'll thank you with calves that fit your dream, progress you can measure, and the quiet satisfaction that comes from a farm with a purpose.

After all, a breeder with direction is almost as rare—and as valuable—as a Highland that never challenges a fence.

Almost.

When it comes to pairing passion with precision, few people do it quite like **John Keep**. A retired U.S. Air Force veteran and federal data analyst, John brings the discipline of a strategist and the curiosity of a lifelong learner to his work at J Bar T Highland Cattle Company, which he's managed since 2003. From the rugged hills of Colorado to the rolling pastures of Missouri, he's built his program on one simple conviction: data tells the truth. John's current focus—developing high-grading, full-blood Highland beef carcasses and Highland crosses that deliver an unforgettable dining experience—isn't just about numbers. It's about purpose. At our [2026 NCHCA Annual Meeting on February 7, 2026](#) in Duluth, John will share how data-driven bull selection can turn breeding from a guessing game into a guided path toward your farm's goals. Whether your sights are set on show ribbons, premium beef, or regenerative success, John's insights will help you put direction behind every decision—and progress within reach.

Read more on page 8

RETURN TO THE HIGHLANDS: HIGHLAND GATHERING 2025

BY JAMIE SCHULZ FLATLAND FARMS



The title is obviously stolen from the tour itself - this was our first ever trip to Scotland. The fact that the whole event was centered on Highland cattle is the only reason Mark allowed me to bully him into attending with me.

This was a wonderful opportunity - and the only thing that I had to do was book our flight to Glasgow. 6 folds (7 if you walked over to look at the cattle at Inveraray Castle) were visited over 5 days, ending with 2 days at the Oban Highland Cattle Show and Sale. The folds were in varying landscapes and the history of each was fascinating. Did you know that the name of the fold/estate is often kept when they are sold to new owners? And the size of the estates/farms was a lot bigger than what we run - thousands of acres in most cases, not the 10s of acres that we own. The environment over there is not a 1.5 acre/cow type of situation, for sure. Many of the farms were working to restore habitat or vegetation communities using Highland cattle - we even had a soil pit to look at on one farm.

The Killochries Fold was the first stop (you can find them on FB if you are interested.) They were using genetic testing to base decisions on, ran about 5500 acres in total, and are actively restoring the moors (dictionary.com: a tract of open, peaty, wasteland, often overgrown with heath, common in high latitudes and altitudes where drainage is poor) using winter grazing by the cattle. I fell in love with the moor landscape.

The Achnacloich Fold - one of the oldest registered herds in Scotland, the estate being acquired in 1892 and their Highland fold started in 1901. There was a lot of wooded habitat here that we didn't see at Killochries - great winter cover for the cows. They were also right on the main road leading into Oban - one of the most photographed herds in the area according to Angus Mackay.

Glenkinglass Fold was where we 1st truly saw the highland landscape - the mountains rising over 4000'. I know - many people in the US would say 'that's not a mountain' -

but I don't know what you would call the rugged, steep landscape if not a mountain - it wasn't a hill. This estate ran 10,000 acres and had a multi-faceted business model that included the cattle, game shooting, fishing and rural tourism. This landscape was my favorite!

Castles Estate was 'right over the mountain' from Glenkinglass. This farm is 8000 acres ranging from 100'-3700' in elevation. This was probably the first place to talk about the sheep that they raised, although I believe all of them had some, somewhere in the mix. They run 2500 ewes which lamb out on the highlands on their own - I thought that was impressive, knowing people here in the states who own sheep. Duncan McLaughlin, the son of the stockman Dan, stole the show here. He seemed to enjoy talking to the visitors and was more than happy to answer questions.

Cladich Fold (FB: The Cladich Fold of Highland Cattle) is also a long-time breeder of Highland cattle. They had their first win in the show ring in 1882 and were listed in the Highland Cattle Society's first herd book in 1885. They also have multiple farming ventures, including the Highland cattle, sheep, accommodations, and agritourism. Pollock Fold was the only farm we were not able to visit - we flew out that morning. It is



within Glasgow's Pollock County Park, and was established 200 years ago.

All the folds visited were different - different types of Highland cattle, different environments, different breeding goals. All the stockmen in charge of managing the folds were very knowledgeable, although Angus Mackay was not successful in getting all of them to speak to the group. Everyone had their favorite stop for various reasons.

Oban Show and Sale - this was an interesting experience to see how animals were presented and what they value in a

show animal. I found talking with the "locals", who attend these events regularly, and learning from them the most valuable part of this experience. I did feel like a visitor in a church who was sitting in a family's bench, though.

Any talk of the trip wouldn't be complete without mention of the emcee of all things Highland cattle - Angus Mackay! He did such a good job talking about the history of each fold and touching the high points of each. He was also very gracious in answering questions during the stops. There was a lot of "Angus Wisdom" shared over the trip. I asked a few questions and thought I would share one eye-opening tidbit about udder quality:

When you calve in winter months, the cow is

not producing large quantities of milk. The calf is going to drink regularly because of the cold and be able to keep up with the milk production. As spring arrives, the cow will start to produce more milk as grass comes available, and the calf is old enough to consume the additional quantity of milk produced. Udder quality is preserved.

If you calve in summer (with mother nature as many would say), the cow is already producing a large quantity of milk and a young calf will not be able to keep up with that milk production. Over the years, the distended quarters will have inner wall break-down, and by the 4th lactation the udder quality is compromised. Shorter productive cow life-span.

Hmmm - always more to think about! This was a big light-bulb moment for me. I sure hope he writes a book with all of this knowledge.

In general, this was a wonderful trip. We met people we would not have met otherwise, experienced great hospitality by everyone in Scotland, ate some terrific food (I was too chicken to try the Haggis, although everyone who did said it was very good), saw the landscape that shaped the "Grande Old Breed" that we all know and love. We were even based in Oban - right on the sea - we took a ferry to the Isle of Mull on our free day and saw dolphins and seals - along with a castle or two and a lighthouse! It was an experience that I will always be grateful for.

TIPS FOR GOING TO SCOTLAND:

1. **Waterproof footwear** - I think the outdoor sporting goods store did a good business after that first day out on the tour!
2. **Good quality waterproof jacket** that you can layer warm clothing underneath
3. **Camera** - although I cherish my iPhone photos, lighting was not the best to capture the beauty of the landscape for a novice like me. Drizzle is the weather staple in the fall.
4. **Something for motion sickness** - those bus drivers are excellent, but miles upon miles of windy, narrow roads got to people.
5. **Your sense of adventure** - so much about Scotland is beyond comprehension coming from a 'young' country such as the US - MN became a state in 1850. The "new" stone fences at Castles Estate Fold were built in the mid 1700's! There is so much to do in Scotland - take a ferry to an island (you can take a 12-mile ferry ride to Ireland!!), go hiking, fishing, shopping, horseback riding, visit a distillery or a castle. There is no chance to get bored, no matter what you like to do.
There is talk of the next gathering being held in Europe in 2028 - start saving and be ready for a great experience.

Where Winter Slows Down—and the Future of Your Farm Comes Into Focus

Why You Should Be in Duluth on February 7, 2026

By the North Central Highland Cattle Association



There's something about February in the North.

The world narrows. The pastures sleep. The cold settles in with a kind of honesty that asks you to take stock—not just of your cattle, but of your direction. Maybe that's why this time of year matters.

Because when the landscape is quiet, the mind finally has room to think.

And that's exactly what the North Central Highland Cattle Association Annual Meeting in Duluth, Minnesota is built for: a midwinter pause with purpose.

A chance to lean back, breathe deep, and step into a room where ideas warm the air and conversations sharpen your thinking.

On February 7, 2026, at the Radisson

Hotel Harbor View, Highland cattle breeders and enthusiasts will gather not merely to attend a meeting—but to experience a reset. A recalibration. A small but meaningful shift in the way you see your farm, your herd, and the work that lies ahead.

This isn't another checkbox on the calendar. **It's an inflection point.**

A Meeting That Carries Meaning

Every producer knows that farming isn't just a job—it's a long series of decisions strung together like barbed wire across a fence line. One choice at a time, you build the operation you hope to pass on.

But the truth is simple: **no one makes their best decisions alone.**

The Annual Meeting exists for that reason—because wisdom grows when it’s shared.

Because the person sitting across from you at lunch may say one thing, ask one question, offer one story that changes the way you think about genetics, grazing, or marketing. Because when Highland folks gather under one roof, the room hums with a sense of possibility.

This year’s program is built around that belief. Opportunities to socialize.

To learn.
To challenge your thinking.
To walk away with practical tools and renewed energy.

And it starts with two speakers who bring substance, not just talk



John Keep: The Numbers Man with a Map to Your Herd’s Future

There’s no shortage of opinions in the cattle world—but true data? That’s rarer.

John Keep of J Bar T Highland Ranch in Missouri is bringing exactly that. His

presentation dives deep into data-driven bull selection, a subject that’s more than genetics—it’s strategy. It’s trajectory. It’s the foundation of where your farm will be five, ten, fifteen years down the line.

John has spent years collecting the kind of on-the-ground information most of us wish we had. He knows what traits matter, what

measurements reveal, and how the right bull can nudge your operation toward the outcomes you’ve been chasing.

His session isn’t about trends. It’s about clarity—about pairing your goals with the animals that will get you there.

For the producer who wants to level up, this is the conversation that moves the needle.



Hannah Bernhardt: The Honest Voice in a Noisy Market

Then there’s the other end of the business: getting your product into the hands—and kitchens—of customers who care.

Hannah Bernhardt of Medicine Creek Farm in Finlayson, Minnesota understands that path firsthand. She and her family sell grass-fed beef, lamb, and forest-raised pork, and they’ve built a brand grounded in authenticity and transparency. But Hannah won’t give you buzzwords or wishful thinking.

She’ll give you the truth. What worked. What didn’t. What surprised them. What almost broke them. What continues to keep customers coming back.

Her marketing session is the kind producers crave: real stories from the trenches, strategies shaped by trial and error, and insights you can take home and implement on Monday morning.

In a world where consumers are overwhelmed by choice, Hannah shows how a farm with heart—and a message grounded in honesty—can cut through the noise.



A Room with a View—and a Purpose

Part of what makes the Annual Meeting special is the setting.

The Radisson Harbor View is a Duluth landmark, perched above the city with sweeping panoramas of Lake Superior. In winter, the lake has a way of reminding you of your own grit—your own resilience. There's a quiet power in that. It's the perfect place to settle in, warm up, and reconnect with people who understand your world better than most.

And with a group rate of \$119/night, available until January 8, 2026,

the meeting becomes not just an event, but a retreat.
A getaway that your future self will thank you for.

Reserve your room at:

<https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/JR04N5>

Why You Need to Be in That Room

Because farming is hard.

Because making the right decisions is harder.

Because the smallest shift in understanding can save months—or years—of frustration.

Because the people who raise Highlands share a bond that feels a little like family.

Because winter gives you the space to reflect, but Duluth gives you the spark to act.

The Annual Meeting is where the season changes—not on the calendar, but in your mind.

You leave with ideas swirling.

With confidence renewed.

With friendships strengthened.

With a clearer vision of what your farm could become.

This isn't a break from your work.

It's an investment in you.

Presidents Message continued.

atmosphere, you won't want to miss it!

For more details visit

<https://highlandcattleusa.org/viewarticle.aspx?aname=nationalshow#gsc.tab=0>

Get ready for one of the biggest NCHCA events of the year! On February 7th in Duluth MN, join NCHCA for our Annual Meeting. Hear updates from me, your President, and committee chairs, cast your vote for board re-appointments, celebrate standout breeders, and support our Association through a silent auction. Plus it's your chance to jump into committee involvement and make your voice heard.

Powerful keynote speakers include John Keep of J Bar T Highland Ranch, who will reveal what you can learn from the data you collect—and how to put it into action. Hannah Bernhardt will speak candidly about how to get your beef into the kitchens of customers who truly care. You'll walk away inspired, informed, and more connected than ever. Whether you're new or experienced, every member will find something to energize their Highland journey.

Don't miss it – see you in February!
Maureen Matt

NORTH CENTRAL MEMBERS IT IS TIME TO RENEW

There are three types of membership:

Regular membership \$40

Sponsored membership \$20

(Current members can sponsor the first year for a new member at a reduced rate)

Junior Membership Free
through age 21

The membership year runs from January through December.

**LET'S PLAN OUR FUTURE
TOGETHER.**

**SCAN THE CODE AND TAKE THE
SURVEY AND BE ENTERED INTO
A CHANCE TO WIN A VERY COOL
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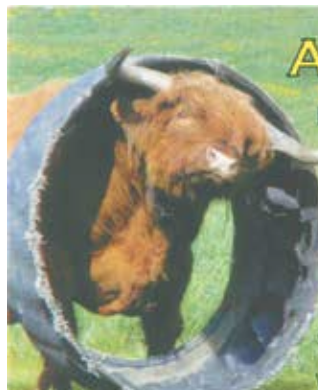
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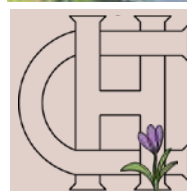
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Order your 2026 NCHCA Calendar



Why stare at a boring office wall when you could be gazing at twelve glorious months of Gorgeous Highland coos in all their hay-munchin', pasture-struttin' glory?

Our 2026 North Central Highland Cattle Association Photo Calendar features stunning shots from member farms—because nothing says “I’ve got good taste” like a Highland cow with better bangs than you.

Printed full color, heavyweight 9x12” with high-gloss UV varnish so fancy you’ll think you’re flipping through the Vogue of bovines. Only \$22.50 plus \$8.50 shipping—which is cheaper than therapy and way more photogenic.

Grab one for the barn, the house, the outhouse, and every cow-lover in your life. Supplies are limited, unlike the number of cow puns we’re willing to make.

You can order online using the link, <https://www.nchca.org/calendar.html> or scan the QR code

Thank you to everyone who participated by submitting and voting on photos and to our calendar committee.

Calendars are created with photos submitted by NCHCA member farms and selected by a vote of the membership.

The 2026 calendar features photos from:

Tabletop Acres, LLC, Chris, Tina, Charli and Jordan Broderick, Oconto, WI

Hidden Ridge Highland Cattle, Dennis Breneman and Maureen Matt, Loganville, WI

Little Creek Highlands, Becky Adams and Jr Fedie, Osseo & Gilmanton, WI

Point Pleasant Cattle Company, Kimber and Seth King, Tonica, IL

JND Livestock, Jesse and Nichole Denver, Grand Rapids, MN

Glory Oaks Farm, Kyle and Katie Baker, Northwood, IA

Midway Meadows Farm, Julianne Motis and Jason Paulson, Esko, MN

Larson’s Headacrez, Jan, Nathan, and Emily Larson, Burlington, WI

Rosewood Ranch, Ken and Julie Schaar, Deer River, MN

Sugar Springs Farm, Elizabeth Townsend and Daniel Shirley, Verona, WI

Climbing Stump Farm, Mark, Randi and Joe Johnson, Harris, MN

Little House and Farm, Michelle and Tony LeTourneau, Hinckley, MN

Stone Fields Farm, Carl and Marcy Lancaster, Claysville, PA

Muddy Acres, Max Schwanke and Mady Dostal, Rice Lake, WI

TFF Ranch, Lee and Melissa Thurman, Nixa, MO

Crocus Hill Cattle Co, Hope and Galen and Bonnie Scheresky, Max, ND

BLS Livestock, Beretta Semmler, Jacobson, MN

\$22
Plus \$8.50 shipping





The North Central Highland Cattle Association (NCHCA) was formed in 1982 to promote Scottish Highland Cattle, form a marketing unit for breeders, and to provide a local organization closer to home. The organization has done this and provides opportunities for youth and families to have fun with their Highland cattle. Our association provides networking and educational opportunities for its members, has an active junior program for youth, and provides a local voice to the national organization, the American Highland Cattle Association.

Board of Directors

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