

Burns Farms

A tradition, a legacy, a dream

The Burns Farms Registered Herefords story spans three generations of a close-knit family with a love of raising cattle. The business, located in Pikeville, the heart of the Sequatchie Valley, began in 1952 when Randel Burns, then the Bledsoe County UT Agricultural Extension Agent, purchased two registered Hereford heifers for son Phillip's 4-H livestock project.

The Burnses — Randel and his wife, Helen, a Bledsoe County native — had cattle on their farm before then, but the 4-H heifers were the beginning of the registered herd that is now the largest in the Southeast.

Phillip Burns had two passions in life — cattle and medicine — and has pursued and fostered both in his lifetime. A very successful surgeon, he is now chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in Chattanooga.

Although his “day job” is as a physician, he has never lost his love for the Hereford breed and his desire to be involved in a “hands-on” capacity in the family business. He and his family split their time be-

tween Chattanooga and Pikeville while the children were growing up, and to this day, Phillip is on the farm nearly every week.

Phillip's son, David, and daughter, Sarah Burns Bernard, grew up spending a lot of time on the farm, inheriting the family love for the cattle business. David recalls at about age 7 checking the cattle with his dad, but when he began showing cattle in the National Junior Hereford Association events, he was hooked.

“Showing cattle as a junior is probably what got me in to all facets of the cattle industry,” David said.

David, the farm manager since 2005, earned a bachelors degree in animal science from Middle Tennessee State University and a master's degree in reproductive physiology from Michigan State University before returning to the farm. His wife, Katie, originally a “city girl” with a love of horses and a bachelor's degree in communications and a master's de-

gree in mental health, is the farm's public relations director.

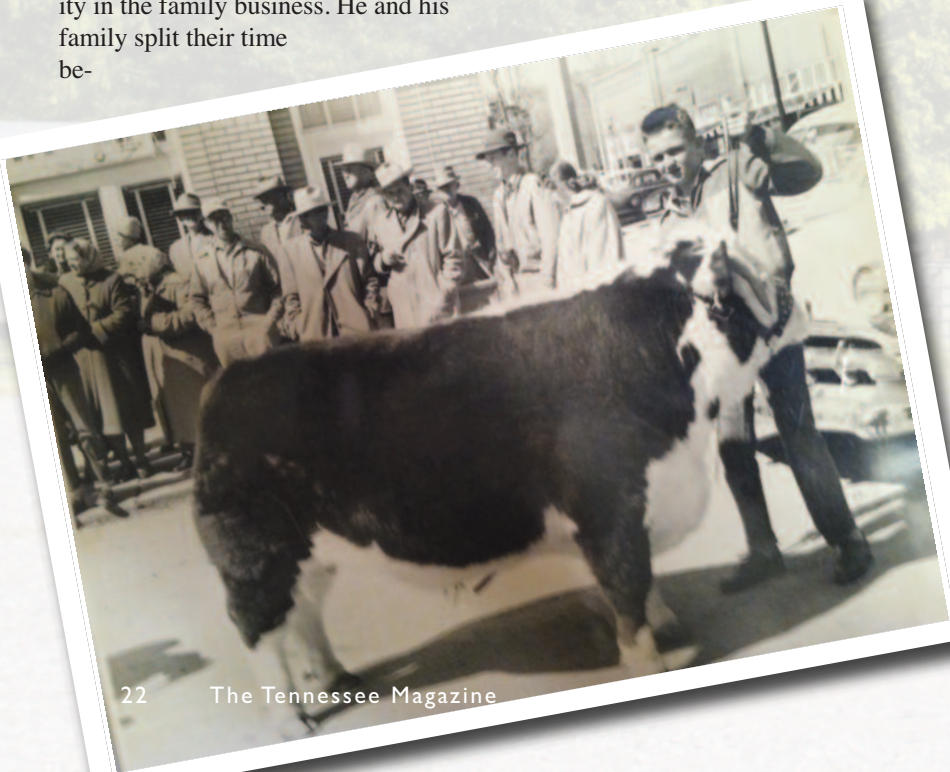
Holding a master's degree in agricultural business from Kansas State University, Sarah Burns Bernard is the farm's business manager.

This team of third-generation Burnses has brought the farm into the 21st century with new methods of producing and marketing high-quality beef cattle.

David's knowledge of animal reproductive physiology and genetics has allowed Burns Farm to improve the quality of the herd. Meanwhile, Katie's marketing skills have broadened the market for their cattle, and Sarah's business skills have boosted their efficiency during sales, in book-keeping and by offering freezer beef for direct sale to consumers.

Before David took over as farm manager, all cattle were sold by private treaty. In 2009, however, a sale barn was constructed, and the majority of cattle sales now take place during the bull and commercial female sale in the fall and the female sale in the spring — a more efficient way of doing business. The sales are widely advertised through social media and on the farm's website, www.burnsfarms.com, in addition to the more traditional methods. Each event is also televised on RFD TV the day of the sale. This allows buyers who are not able to come to Pikeville to see the livestock on TV and place bids online or by phone.

In addition to their April and November sales, on Saturday, Sept. 24, the Burnses will be hosting the first-ever Burns Farms and Friends Sale. Besides selling livestock from their



Phillip Burns shows one of the first registered Hereford heifers in a 4-H show in 1956.



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**— David Burns, Farm Manager
Burns Farms, Pikeville**

David Burns and wife Katie are a part of the current generation of Burnses to manage the family cattle operation that annually sells approximately 150 bulls in addition to commercial heifers, cow/calf pairs, bred heifers and show cattle. Katie handles public relations, and David is farm manager. David’s sister, Sarah Burns Bernard, is business manager, and their father, Dr. Phillip Burns, is still actively involved in farm operations.

herd, they will also be marketing livestock from some of their customers and friends who have smaller herds with a few cattle for sale but are lacking the numbers or resources to host sales of their own. The invitation to participate in this sale is latest addition to Burns Farms’ customer service and support initiative.

The September “friends” sale will include prospective show cattle for youth programs. The Burnses haven’t forgotten their beginnings with just a couple of heifers for the 4-H livestock shows or the love for the business that came from showing cattle at the National Junior Hereford Association events. They still sell show cattle for youth and provide instruction on animal care, nutrition, training and showmanship to help ensure a positive experience.

In all their business transactions, the Burnses believe in exceptional customer service. “We don’t just sell you a cow and say, ‘Good luck,’” says David. “We provide our customers with support. We know that many of our customers have a passion for cattle and a passion for getting back to the farm. Many are people who live or work in the city and want to get back to a rural setting. They want to know where their food comes from; want to understand the process of how food goes from the farm to the table; want their children to learn the life lessons of responsibility, hard work, respect and patience that come with raising, showing and selling livestock. We offer consultation services to help customers be successful with their cattle businesses and dreams no matter their level of interest. We want our customers to succeed as much as they want to succeed. Build-

ing respect and trust with customers is what has helped us stay in the business for more than 60 years.”

The Burns family wants to enable their buyers to continue the tradition and preserve the legacy of raising cattle so that future generations can follow their passion and achieve their dreams just as the three generations of the Burns family have.

As the largest registered Hereford operation in the Southeast, Burns Farms has brought a lot of national attention to Bledsoe County and the Sequatchie Valley. “We have buyers who come in from all over the country — 16 states at our last sale,” says David. “Many of them are in awe of the beauty of the Valley. Some of them spend as much time admiring the view as they do the cattle. They love this little oasis of Pikeville. Many of the buyers spend time here during the sale and then return for vacations at nearby Fall Creek Falls State Park, which helps out the local economy. We also have lots of visitors with the UT Extension tours and Beef Field Days we host each year.”

The Burns family also believes in giving back to the industry they love. The family has long been strong supporters of the American Hereford Association with Phillip serving as president in 1998. David supports the local Cattlemen’s Association and has served as a judge for 4-H and Junior Hereford Association cattle shows.

Family businesses such as Burns Farms that are striving to preserve our rural heritage while providing excellence in customer service and improving their chosen industries and the local economy are a big part of what makes our area Co-op Strong.