

# More Than Just a GAP

To some, it is just a hat. To others, it represents their favorite brand or sports team. But to pork producers across the state of Texas, it symbolizes something much more.

Lexie Schaefer, current Certified Texas Bred Registry (CTBR) Foundation scholarship recipient, points with pride to the rows of Class Champion ball caps that hang on the wall of the Schaefer Livestock office.

“We work hard throughout the year to earn those champion ball caps,” Schaefer said. “Being able to say we are Texas breeders who have seen a lot of success is something we are extremely proud of.”

Established 20 years ago, the Texas Pork Producers Association’s (TPPA) CTBR program has evolved into a highly regarded program within the Texas show industry.

Prior to the CTBR, pork producers were becoming more and more aware of the fact agricultural science teachers, extension agents and families were traveling out of state to purchase their show pigs. In an effort to address this issue, several producers came together and approached TPPA about the need to start a program, like the CTBR.

“In the past there was some sort of connotation that hogs bred elsewhere were superior to the ones raised in Texas,” said Brandon Gunn, TPPA executive vice-president. “This was false. In fact, Texas has been known to produce some of the most competitive show pigs in the country.”

The purpose of this program is to promote show pigs that are bred and raised in Texas while showcasing both the youth who exhibit the hogs, and the producers who participate in the program.

“Promoting your state is not only good, but its necessary,” Gunn said. “As more exhibitors and producers are recognized for their success, we see more interest in families to make the decision to purchase hogs from Texas breeders.”

Today, more than 450 pork producers across the state of Texas participate in the CTBR program and more than 12,000 registry certificates are sold annually. In order for a producer to participate, he or she must be a TPPA member. They submit registration forms and purchase certificates

from the association that are to be given to the youth who purchase and show their hogs.

“This is the largest and most successful program the TPPA has in place. In fact, the program has been so successful other states have reached out to TPPA in an effort to learn more about the CTBR,” Gunn said.

Certified Texas Bred Registry hogs are recognized at male market hog shows including State Fair of Texas, San Antonio Stock Show, Fort Worth Stock Show, Houston Livestock Show, Rodeo Austin, and the San Angelo Stock Show. The highest placing CTBR hog in each class is considered the CTBR champion. The youth exhibiting them will receive a one hundred dollar premium check. Since the start of the program, TPPA has given out more than \$600,000 in premium checks. Both the exhibitors and

the breeders of a class champion also receive a “Champion” baseball cap.

“Our producers are extremely proud to be a part of this program,” Gunn said. “Exhibitors and breeders both proudly wear those ball caps and they will sport them year round at shows.”

Throughout the year, TPPA keeps accurate records of all CTBR producers’ class champions. The top ten ranked producers at the end of the year are recognized at the annual TPPA conference and awards banquet. They also recognize any Texas

breeder who has raised a grand or reserve champion at any of the major Texas stock shows. Texas pork producers take the CTBR program very seriously and promote it extensively each year.

“Not only do breeders receive some very nice awards from the association for their success,” Gunn said. “But the recognition they receive helps generate sales for their showpig operations.”

According to a research study released by Texas A&M University, the benefits of competitive livestock exhibition are extremely beneficial to youth development. More specifically, these youth develop strong social skills early on and are shaping their character as they learn work ethic, decision-making skills, sportsmanship, and the importance of working together as a family.

“Showing livestock not only brings families together, but they are able to make memories that will last a lifetime,” said Kyle Stephens, president of the Texas Pork Producers Board. “They come together while working towards one common goal and are able to take away many important life lessons.”

“My family is extremely competitive,” Schaefer said. “When my siblings and I would walk into the ring, we were there to win. But at the same time, it is all about spending time together as a family and building relationships. These relationships and networking opportunities carry on even after the banners are hung on the wall.”

The CTBR program goes beyond recognition in the show ring. It has been investing in the future of Texas youth since 2011 when the CTBR Foundation scholarship was established. Each year during the San Angelo sale, there is a Foundation gilt that is donated by one of the top 10 most successful hog breeders in Texas.

*“These relationships and networking opportunities carry on even after the banners are hung on the wall.”*

The recipients of this scholarship are selected based on their academic performance in the classroom, extra-curricular activities, industry leadership, and participation in the CTBR program throughout their showing career. Over the last five years, the Foundation has awarded more than \$35,000 in scholarships.

For students who do not wish to attend college, but instead want to start their own show pig operation, the CTBR Foundation also has production grants available. These youth must fill out applications and present their business plans in order to qualify and are given a minimum of a \$2,500 grant. Scholarships and grants are presented at the awards banquet at the end of April during the TPPA annual industry conference.

“I don’t know of another way that an organization could be any more beneficial to both producers and youth,” Stephens said. 🙌



Photo courtesy of Show Photos by Katina.



{ MEGAN SKILES  
BOWIE, ARIZONA }