

Marvin B. Johnson, Jr.

(SJDH – Smiling Johnson Dexter Headquarters)



September 11, 1934 – November 12, 2016

The American Dexter Cattle Association acknowledges the passing of Marvin B. Johnson, a former Region 6 Director (1996 – 2001), and an exceptional promoter of the Dexter cattle breed. Marvin was honored for his outstanding contributions to the breed with the Talisman Award in 2011.

Marvin Johnson discovered Dexter cattle through an article in the *High Plains Journal* in 1987. Motivated by that article, he began searching for registered Dexter breeding stock to become a Dexter cattle breeder/owner in his “retirement” years. Jim Johnson in Ohio (Briar Hill herd) had sold five Dexter bulls to Bill Bledsoe in Colorado. In 1990, Marvin and Brent Powell (Dexter Future Venture), went together and bought two of these bulls, Boru O’Briar Hill and Holligan O’Briar Hill. They purchased registered Dexter cows to build their new herds from George Branson (Whispering Pines herd), Doyle Briscoe (Briscoe’s DBL D Stock Farms) and from Harry Julian (Harbil herd), in Texas.

Located in Elkhart, Kansas; Marvin advertised that his ranch was “stationed in the Oklahoma Panhandle”. This facilitated access to Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. Taking an innovative approach to building his herd, Marvin advertised in the January/February 1994 Dexter Bulletin for “Free yearling bulls with my option to buy yearling heifers @ \$500 each”. By 1995, Smiling Johnson Dexter Headquarters was “a brand and Breed on the move”.

As a Dexter owner/breeder, Marvin bred and registered 144 Dexter cattle with his own herd prefix “SJDH”, or simply “SJ”. He purchased and transferred many more animals, providing registered Dexter foundation stock to new Dexter owners throughout the Midwest in the 1990’s.

Marvin Johnson became Region 6 Director in 1996. At that time, Region 6 consisted of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. He continued actively exploring opportunities to promote the Dexter breed for

use as beef, as trained oxen, and with 4-H Youth. Marvin had a special passion for connecting young people with Dexter cattle. He used his own Dexter oxen team, named Calvin & Hobbes, with yoke, cart, and sled, to publicize the Dexter breed in many different venues, including the Kansas State Fair, historical re-enactments, and parades.

In 1996, Marvin offered a chance for 4-H Youth to win a Dexter steer to show at their county fair. Matthew Gesner, of Douglas County, Kansas, won the contest, and picked out a young Dexter steer from Marvin's herd in February 1996. Matthew named him "Little Brave" and showed him in 4-H at the Douglas County Fair in August 1996. This steer was processed in November 1996, at 20 months of age, at a live weight of 800 pounds and hanging weight of 468 pounds. The carcass graded as "Choice" and it garnered very favorable comments. Ribeye samples from this steer were submitted to Kansas State University for taste/tenderness testing. Marvin's ranch ad in the 1997 ADCA Dexter Bulletin included the statement, "Breeding for the ultimate in flavor and low fat for the health conscious consumer."

By 1999, Marvin had expanded his Dexter cattle business to include buying other breeders cattle, taking cattle on consignment for 10% commission, and finding Dexter cattle for interested buyers for a 10% finder's fee. He would pick up and deliver anywhere in the USA for \$25.00 per hour driving time one way. He called himself "Smiling Papa Johnson, Dexter Cattle Broker". Hosting the 1999 ADCA Annual General Meeting in Wichita, Kansas was a highlight for Marvin during his time as a Regional Director.

Marvin embraced new opportunities for himself and other Dexter owners and breeders. He led by example, and actively supported the development of an ADCA Dexter Cattle Classification program, and the OSU Dexter Steer Feed-out Study. In 2001, Smiling Johnson Dexter Headquarters became the first Dexter herd in Kansas to offer ADCA registered, polled Dexter cows and bulls.

During his last year as the Region 6 Director, Marvin's Spring 2001 Dexter Bulletin message included a rally call to breeders in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas to participate in the upcoming Kansas State Fair Dexter Show in September 2001. He signed off with "Your Old Dexter Promoting Buddy, Smiling Papa Johnson".

