

Junior Nationals to Juris Doctor

Jara Settles, Angus Foundation success story, brings her law degree back to assist the American farmer and rancher.

by Karen Hiltbrand, American Angus Association

Think back to about the mid-1990s when the United States had its first outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Now imagine this — a young, grade-schooler who was awfully fired up about the false claims that Oprah Winfrey was making about her industry and the quality of beef being produced by American cattle producers. Following the story, this little, but passionate farmgirl knew from this time on, when she grew up, she wanted to be a lawyer so she could represent the agricultural industry.

“A lot of people ask why I wanted to become a lawyer,” says Jara Settles, Angus Foundation success story. “It was a long time ago and I was in grade school. The [BSE] outbreak happened in the United Kingdom and a lot of people freaked out — including Oprah Winfrey.”

Oprah at that point was a person many Americans looked to and she more-or-less warned people about what they should believe about how BSE could be contracted.

“I can remember being so mad about it — even as a little kid because that’s not true, that’s not right, that’s not how you get [BSE]. So, from there a group of Texas cattlemen sued her for — in their minds — defamatory words,” she says.

She laughs and says, even though she knows why that group of cattlemen didn’t win, it’s the memory that marks the point in time when

she decided she wanted to become a lawyer.

“At that point I remember telling my mom that if I was their lawyer I would have won that case for the beef industry,” she says. “So that’s what sparked the interest — thanks to Oprah Winfrey.”

Settles knew what she wanted, even as a little girl. Today, she works as general counsel and vice president of risk mitigation for the Livestock Marketing Association (LMA) in Kansas City.

Big dreams, a strong work ethic and Angus cattle are the common threads between the five Angus Foundation success stories. From their endeavors on the ranch to pursuing their college degrees, they all possess the solid foundation of drive, proving them as exceptional role models for juniors across the country.

The journey

Growing up in northeast Nebraska, Settles could be found out in the barn a majority of the time. The Settles family predominately raised Angus cattle on their cow-calf operation, along with a few other breeds.

She attended Butler Community College on a livestock judging scholarship during the first two years of her education, then she transferred to Kansas State University (K-State) to finish up her animal science degree. After

finishing her undergraduate degree, Settles moved to Topeka to attend Washburn University School of Law to get her Juris Doctor.

“My mom is a big advocate for the professional development and the career development contests, and we spent every summer going to junior nationals,” she says.

Settles says junior programs have been extremely influential in directing her to the path she is on today, and often she would attend junior nationals primarily to compete in each and every one of those contests.

“The Association, the junior programs, the Auxiliary, the Foundation, they all go together to help folks in whatever career trajectory they want to take,” she says. “If I were to look back and try to pinpoint, well this piece came from this and this piece came from that, I think it’s hard because it is all so foundational.”

Settles attributes her ability to comfortably communicate with producers and market-owners to the development opportunities that she received while being involved in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

Additionally, the Angus Foundation served as an essential factor in Settles’ decision to attend law school. Not only did the Foundation provide support

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through scholarships but they also encouraged the confidence and poise it takes to represent her members.

Bringing goals to fruition

“It’s doing the little things,” she says. “The real crux of working hard and attaining your goals is doing the little things, and doing them consistently and doing them right.”

Since Settles is an only child, she says she has a habit of collecting mentees. Today, Settles mentors numerous juniors and this is exactly the type of things she tells them.

“At home are you truly pushing through? Are you truly doing everything you could have done? Are you really thinking about those details?” she asks her mentees. “Because if you are consistently thinking about those details, the big picture just comes with it.”

To this day Settles puts her own advice to use; from selling club lambs at home to solving her members’ problems in the office. Before practicing at LMA, Settles worked at

a large firm in Kansas City. Moving to LMA was like coming home.

“Being able to come back home, essentially, to the livestock industry is everything to me,” she says. “Our members are wonderful people, they work hard every day.”

Interestingly enough, the legal industry has some similarities.

“If you think of a farmer, or rancher or a lawyer they all don’t really look like me,” she says, nodding at the notion that she is a female in two stereotypically male-dominated industries.

Instead of looking at this barrier as a blockade, Settles chooses to take a different approach: to look at it as a sign of opportunity for the younger generation of women to come.

“To be able to break those molds, I think is a great opportunity,” she says. “A lot of really strong and awesome women have paved the path for me. I am a beneficiary of that, and I appreciate that. What is really cool is that little girls showing an interest in practicing law right

now, they don’t really even think there is a barrier, which I think is the true win.”

She attributes her confidence and ability to pursue her educational goals to numerous factors that include her family, junior programs and scholarships she received from the Angus Foundation.

“The Angus Foundation’s core mission of youth, education and research are so important to developing young people to come back into our breed, into our community and to our industry as a whole,” she says. “If we don’t invest in these young people and welcome them back in, and give them truly viable opportunities in terms of education and professional growth, they might leave us.”

From mentoring juniors, to serving the agricultural industry, to posing as a consistent role model, there is no question Settles has proven herself to be an Angus Foundation success story. **AJ**

