



Opening Eyes, Opening Doors

Leaders Engaged in Angus Development unites juniors from across the country.

Story by **Jena McRell**, digital editor; photos by **Jena McRell & Carrie Horsley**

Laughter echoes through a plush lawn owned by a fourth-generation mushroom farmer. In Kennett County, Pa., an impromptu team-building activity has begun. The energy and enthusiasm is quite obvious as National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members quickly dart back and forth.

Young adults from California run in circles to catch up with their friends from Virginia, South Dakota and Texas. They are surrounded by deep green, umbrella-like trees that have towered in the same position for generations. An occasional horse investigates their game from across the narrow road.

Angus juniors who congregate once a year at the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development conference, commonly known as LEAD, don't miss an opportunity to have fun together, and laugh.

There's lots of laughing.

NJAA members have Angus cattle and agriculture in common, yet their lives are all different. For a few days at the LEAD conference, they share those differences and

create friendships that will stand strong, year after year, and show after show.

"What makes LEAD special is that the cattle are left at home," said Jacy Alsup, Gravette, Ark., retired chairman of the National Junior Angus Board (NJAB). "When you're at a show, you are there to work, and so it's good to be here and to be able to make those friendships. They can hang out with each other all week and be focused on learning, exploring and making those experiences with their friends."

This year's LEAD conference brought together more than 130 Angus juniors from nearly 30 different states. Oregon juniors

► **Above:** National Junior Angus Association members stop for a photo on the Philadelphia Art Museum steps, where Rocky Balboa made his champion stride.

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traveled the farthest distance, and almost 20 members from Pennsylvania welcomed the group to their home state. Youth ages 14 to 21 years old participated in the event, themed "Forefathers & Farmers: Cultivating Angus Youth."

With support from the Angus Foundation, the NJAB coordinated and hosted the conference July 31 to Aug. 4. Juniors spent four days exploring the region's agriculture — from Angus cattle farms to mushroom farms — and the nation's history, which runs as deep as the soil in that part of the world.

"This is my first year at the LEAD conference, so I'm kind of a rookie," said Madelyn Gerken, Cashion, Okla. "I really have enjoyed all of it — from getting to go to the different farms to seeing the historical sites. Many opportunities have been opened up to me throughout this conference. You learn so much."

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A day on the farm

While at the center of the nation's most populous region, Pennsylvania agriculture has much to showcase. Abundant rain, nutrient-rich soil and easy market access give the area a competitive advantage in the northeast. The group toured Herr Angus Farm, an operation steeped in family history and innovation, and the world-renowned Cherry Knoll Farm, home to some of the country's best Angus genetics.

Kennett County, Pennsylvania — southwest of Philly — produces almost 60% of fresh mushrooms in the United States. Each day, the area's farmers send homegrown mushrooms to nearby major

cities, including Philadelphia, New York and beyond. It's a tedious process, but one that farmers take great pride in supplying.

"They're selling mushrooms every day," said Royce Erdmann, Leola, S.D. "With us, it's once a year you sell cattle. It's really cool to see how mushrooms are grown and the different stages. It just puts a new perspective on when you see mushrooms in the store, I know exactly how that was made."

Following the mushroom-farm tours, and spirited games on the lawn, LEAD participants loaded up on four tour buses and traveled the winding roads to Cherry Knoll Farm in West Grove, Pa. The route is lined with vibrant green pastures, Colonial-

style homes and farmsteads that hold memory of the country's Revolution.

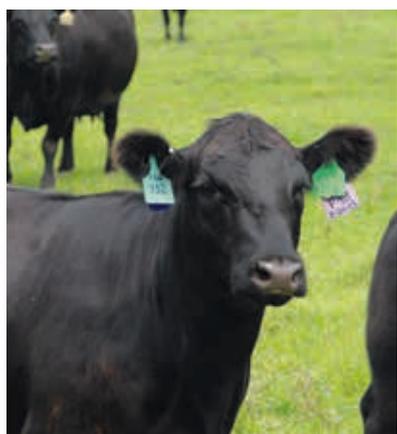
Juniors were welcomed at Cherry Knoll by owners Margaret and Bob Duprey. They walked through the farm's pristine horse arena and stable, then had dinner at the top of one of many gentle hills surrounding the area. The rainy evening broke clear just in time for participants to take a walk around the cattle barn, where they viewed calves being prepped for an upcoming sale. Juniors spent time in the pens, which overlook some of Pennsylvania's most cherished farmland.

Steady, rolling hills adorned by tree after tree, with a slight fog settling across the

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► The art of mushroom farming took LEAD participants by surprise, as they toured several operations in the region famous for the specialty ag crop.



► Dennis Byrne, Herr Angus Farm manager, makes juniors feel right at home in the pasture of his operation, located southwest of Philadelphia. Down from the farm a couple miles is Herr's Chip Factory, where the family business brands snack products across the East Coast.





► A picture-perfect setting at Herr Angus Farm showcases all the best of Pennsylvania agriculture – green pastures, cool temperatures and a hint of rain.



► **Above:** Jim “Basketball” Jones challenges Kansas junior Esther McCabe to a dance competition during the first night of the LEAD conference.

► **Right:** NJAA members tour a mushroom farm in Kennett County, Pa., an area that supplies more than half of the nation’s fresh mushrooms.



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tranquil valley. As the sun began to set, NJAA members presented Margaret and Bob a special portrait sketch as a token of their appreciation for the generous support the couple provides to the organization.

“It was inspiring to chat with the juniors, see where they were from, listen to their questions and be able to answer them,” said Margaret Duprey. “I find that the young adults are very appreciative of what people do for them, and I certainly appreciate the juniors here in the Angus industry.”

LEAD participants also toured Herr Angus Farm, which has a long-standing heritage in both agriculture and entrepreneurship. In 1946, James Stauffer Herr bought a small

potato chip company for \$1,750. Today throughout the East Coast, it's easy to spot a variety of snacks branded with the Herr's family name. Angus juniors were able to tour the potato chip factory, a little over an hour southwest of Philadelphia, where they process nearly 500,000 pounds of potatoes each day.

A few miles down the road from the factory is Herr Angus Farm. Sitting under a shade tree, a cool morning presented Angus juniors an opportunity to learn about the farm's efforts to repurpose byproducts from the factory into their feeding and irrigation systems.

Manager Dennis Byrne spoke to the group about their production goals, gave tours

around the pasture, and explained how the farm uses byproducts from the factory to fuel its agriculture production. A special mix of leftover popcorn, chips and cheese snacks are used in the farm's feedlot. They call it “steer party mix,” and use it as part of a carefully managed ration mixed with corn, minerals and protein.

“[These] young people have great minds, and they have a lot of great questions,” Byrne said. “They really want to do something with this world, and I think it's important that as adults, we let them know that they can do that, that they have the minds and the capability to take us to another level.”

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►Margaret Duprey, Cherry Knoll Farm, shares a laugh with juniors during dinner at the Pennsylvania farm.



►Team-building activities at LEAD are always entertaining. Tyler Bush, South Dakota, Michela Clowser, Nebraska, and Shelby Dean, Pennsylvania, show off their marshmallow-eating skills.



►A conference highlight for many was visiting Cherry Knoll Farm and viewing elite genetics while walking through a group of calves in the pens.



►Steer “party mix” is a central part of the nutrition program at Herr Angus Farm. It’s a mixture of leftover snack products from the factory that are repurposed for cattle rations.



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Because of the farm's proximity to the Port of Wilmington in Delaware — a significant springboard for livestock export — Herr Angus Farm often serves as a quarantine station for cattle heading overseas. LEAD participants were able to see a group of dairy cattle headed for Turkey.

The export market was a topic of discussion throughout the educational workshops at LEAD. Kate Bowers, a representative from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), gave an overview of how exports affect the entire agriculture industry, and how the region plays an important role in preparing cattle to go overseas.

Motivated by history

Walking the cobbled streets of downtown Philadelphia, thoughts turned toward what it must have been like to witness the many historical moments in the nation's lifetime. From the first meeting of the Continental Congress to the signing of the *Declaration of Independence*, and the many influential leaders who walked the same paths in history — George Washington, Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, to name a few.

During their time in the city, juniors were able to see the Liberty Bell, walk around Independence Hall, visit Betsy Ross's home, visit the National Constitution Center and, of course, sample the city's famous cuisine.

"I have to get my hands on a Philly cheesesteak," said Kyle Bratton, Caldwell, Idaho. "This is the city that is known for it; I have got to get one!"

The group posed for a photo on the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum, where Rocky Balboa made his champion stride, and navigated the city alongside tourists from many cultures and backgrounds. While a busy downtown atmosphere might not be commonplace for Angus juniors, participants welcomed the experience and the chance to explore together.

In addition to the farm visits and a city excursion, youth participated in several team-building activities and



► **Above:** Dream big, you are special – NJAA members share positive messages with low-income youth through the organization Cradles to Crayons.

► **Left:** Phil Bass, corporate meat scientist for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand, gives a meat-cutting demonstration as part of the LEAD agriculture career workshops.

educational workshops throughout the LEAD conference. Attendees also attended seminars on careers in agriculture presented by industry professionals in meat science, nutrition, genetics and marketing.

Juniors enjoyed a presentation by Jim “Basketball” Jones, an entertainer and motivational speaker, who stressed the importance of valuing personal strengths and reaching goals. In similar fashion, speaker Laymon Hicks spoke about appreciating relationships and the positive impact juniors can make on the world around them.

Ultimately, they were motivated to step outside their comfort zones, make new

friends and continue developing leadership skills through the NJAA.

“The LEAD conference is important because juniors need to know that they’re making a difference with what they do,” Bratton said. “In all actuality, we are the future. We’re the ones who are going to make a difference in the Angus breed.”

The relationships fostered through the LEAD conference, and other programs offered through the NJAA and the American Angus Association, aren’t simply friendships. These youth are future business partners, showing competitors, mentors or colleagues. They are the next generation of breed leaders, cattle industry influencers and adult

volunteers. They will define the business for years to come.

When they do, they’ll remember the time spent with friends; the laughter and experiences they gained while traveling the country, even in the yard of a mushroom farm.



Why attend LEAD?

First-year attendees share why National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members should take advantage of the opportunity to attend a Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference.

Daniel Rohrbaugh, Seven Valleys, Pa.

“They’re just good people to be around. You get to really learn a lot about different parts of the country — what their climate is and how their animals differ from ours. The farthest we’ve bought an animal from is Virginia, and it’s just amazing how you get to meet new people, but you know people that you know. Everybody is so close in the Angus world.”

Royce Erdmann, Leola, S.D.

“To be part of LEAD is a completely different experience for me. I mean, my town has 350 people, and so coming to a place like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is just a complete culture shock. Getting to talk to all the different kids from around the country has been great; to get to know how they run operations and the herd sizes, and what’s it like to have so much land in different places.”

Madelyn Gerken, Cashion, Okla.

“I would tell them (potential LEAD participants) to open up some doors and walk through them, because they never know what’s behind that door. It truly is an amazing conference, and they can learn so much from this conference. I’ve met someone from California, and I thought it was pretty cool because they live in such a diverse community and it’s so cool to hear what’s all going on in their state.”

Kyle Bratton, Caldwell, Idaho

“I’ve met people from different backgrounds, different states, all over the United States. The marketing and genetics workshops I attended are going to help me become a better Angus breeder. I’m hoping that everyone else that came here also took that knowledge and will make the best out of it.”



► Red, white and blue near Betsy Ross’s home in downtown Philadelphia. Angus juniors spent an afternoon exploring Philly and the history it holds.



► National Junior Angus Board members Lindsay Upperman, Jessica Radcliffe and Shane Kerner show their enthusiasm for the city of brotherly love.