

Creating Their Future

Through involvement in NCBA's newly formed Young Producers' Council, these young beef enthusiasts are stepping up to help shape a positive future for the industry.

by Kindra Gordon

As a field services representative for The Beef Connection, a Kentucky-based company that helps producers market age- and source-verified feeder calves and also provides carcass data to its members, Evan Tate works directly with many producers within Kentucky and surrounding states.

But Tate, who is 25, says one trend that has become evident to him is that he's often making presentations to groups of beef producers whose average age is older than his own parents.

"I might see a grandson tagging along with his grandfather every now and then, but no one remotely close to my age is often in attendance," he says.

Tate knows several people his own age who have stayed in agriculture with ag sales jobs, but he says it's scary that fewer and fewer young people are going into production agriculture.

"It's hard to preserve the family farm working in town — and their children will grow up outside of production ag as well," says Tate, who grew up on a small commercial Angus operation, showed cattle and served as his local FFA president.

To help build a positive future for production agriculture for the next generation, Tate says, the answer is to get young people like himself involved in the industry. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) recognizes the importance of getting the younger generation involved, as well. Thus, during its 2008 summer convention, the NCBA board of directors passed an interim resolution creating the Young Producers' Council (YPC), specifically for NCBA members who are 18-35 years old. The YPC has a voice in the form of one council member on each NCBA policy group committee.

The YPC held its first official meeting during the January 2009 Cattle Industry Annual Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., and within the past year its membership has grown to nearly 250 individuals. YPC also maintains a presence on Facebook for news and discussion, and the page has more than 1,000 followers, reports Nate Jaeger, a field representative for NCBA based in

Birmingham, Ala.

"We have a lot of young producers interested in becoming more involved in the leadership in NCBA, and that is exciting to see," Jaeger says.

"It was what I was looking for — a group of like-minded, young individuals wanting to preserve our industry and have a say on policy that affects not only current issues, but those that we will be facing in the future," Tate adds.

Similar sentiments

John Schroeder and Cari Rincker have gotten involved in YPC for similar reasons. Schroeder, who is 33, is general manager of the 48,000-head Darr Feedlot at Cozad, Neb. Rincker is a recent law school graduate who is establishing her own firm as an agriculture attorney in New York. She also co-owns Rincker Cattle Co. and Blackacre Ranch Photography.

Schroeder sees several benefits from the YPC effort. Foremost, he says it's an opportunity for young people

to become involved in the industry and also gain an understanding of how NCBA policy is established and implemented.

He counts the network of young people in YPC as an important part of the beef industry's future. "This is a group of people I will be connected with for the next 10-20 years," he says, pointing out that these young leaders will evolve into the next

generation of leadership for the industry.

Rincker is also excited about the opportunity for young people like herself to get involved in NCBA. "This generation of livestock producers has a special zeal about them," she says. "We're involved in social media and knowledgeable about the beef industry. We want to get involved in our community, but we just need a platform to do so in order to really showcase our talents and leadership abilities. YPC gives this platform to NCBA and the beef industry."

Additionally, Schroeder says, through NCBA and YPC more voices — both young and old — are being trained to become better spokespeople for the beef industry. As an example, Schroeder tells that he is involved with the Master of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program through NCBA. "Being trained to talk to the media about our industry is becoming increasingly important," he says.

Favorable future

During 2009, YPC's goal has been to continue to spread the word and recruit more members while providing educational programs for current members that will help them prepare for the future.

Schroeder, who serves on YPC's Live Cattle Marketing Committee, says the group will likely meet this fall, prior to their formal meeting during the 2010 NCBA Cattle Industry Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas.

Tate serves on the Agriculture Policy Committee, and Rincker is on the Resolutions Committee. Tate adds that as the membership has grown, additional subcommittees have been added to allow more people to get involved.

Asked where YPC is going, Tate says, "The sky is the limit." He adds, "I want every person in the U.S. ages 18 to 35 involved with animal ag to join and participate. Joining is not enough — get involved. We've got a good start, but we're not where we want to be yet. If my involvement in YPC allows my fellow young cattlemen to secure a future in the industry — we've won!"

Schroeder says he believes the real asset of YPC will be in attracting young people at the grassroots level of county cattle associations.



Evan Tate



John Schroeder



Cari Rincker

Look for a YPC blog

The Young Producers' Council (YPC) is also keeping beef enthusiasts informed through Facebook, a social networking site, and has recently rolled out its own blog.

Cari Rincker, who grew up on a seedstock operation in Illinois, says she first learned about YPC via Facebook.

Rincker is presently an agriculture attorney and owner of Rincker Law PLLC in New York. Her involvement with YPC includes serving as a voting member of the Resolutions Committee and being chairperson of YPC's Public Relations Committee.

Rincker says YPC is focused on having a strong presence in social media, and she reports that YPC introduced its first blog, titled "Cattle Call," which focuses on the issues affecting young producers in the beef industry. YPC members from across the country will contribute to the blog.

Rincker says she's already seeing a lot of enthusiasm and interest from young people in YPC, and, looking ahead, she anticipates that more events and networking opportunities at the annual Cattle Industry Convention will be focused toward young producers. Likewise, Rincker anticipates that state affiliates will have their own YPC group on the state level to allow more young producers to get involved.

As the council evolves, Rincker says there is also the possibility for YPC's structure to be analogous to NCBA — giving YPC a voting member on all of NCBA's committees.

She encourages YPC members who are interested in deciding the structure of YPC to get involved by visiting with current officers and visiting YPC's Facebook discussion board. "It's only through conversation that we can really learn from one another," Rincker concludes.

In addition to Facebook, YPC's official hashtag on twitter is #YPCBeef.

"Local county involvement builds a strong foundation that carries through to state and national memberships," he says. He hopes to see YPC activities at the university level as well, so college graduates go on to be involved in the industry through YPC.

For more information on YPC, visit www.beefusa.org/membyoungproducerscouncil.aspx, or learn more about the group through its presence on Facebook.

