

Growing People, Not Cattle

Once a young, timid boy, Michael Cropp found his path thanks to junior Angus programs.

by Karen Hiltbrand, American Angus Association

It's March in Virginia. There is snow on the ground, but you're not cold because you're so excited to be at the Mid-Atlantic Junior Angus Classic with your junior Angus friends. You're attending a mini-conference being hosted at the show, and you just got your pizza. You sit down by yourself to eat when someone who looks important wearing a green coat approaches you.

Of course, you recognize this older junior member because he belongs to the elite group known as the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors (NJAB).

You're still pretty shy and nervous, but this person in a green coat comes and sits down next to you. You both talk about the show, where you are from and do the activities after the meal together. By the end of the day, you are friends.

Fast-forward 12 years later, and life comes full circle. You are a now-retired NJAB director, as well as that past green-coat's co-coach for the Iowa State University (ISU) Meats Animal Evaluation Team.

This is the story of Michael Cropp, a past NJAA member, NJAB director and past Angus Foundation scholarship recipient.

"That one moment of that green coat sitting next to me and having a conversation with me like I was a peer, meant the world to me," Cropp says. "I wanted to be just like them growing up, and so that was one of the driving factors for me to pursue

my dream and vision to becoming a green coat."

Now an extension program specialist at ISU and meat science Ph.D. student, Cropp says he attributes his work ethic, opportunities and network of people to his involvement in the NJAA.

East-coaster goes West

Growing up on the East Coast on a small Angus farm, Cropp was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA.

"We traveled to regional and national Angus shows and it was what we did as a family," he says.

"The Angus Association does it right: It's not just catered to high school students or younger students — everyone can find their place and their niche."

Even though Cropp spent his entire junior career showing cattle, he still believes that it's the development of relationships that made it worthwhile.

"At the end of the day, yes, we showed some cattle; but it was about growing people, not cattle," Cropp says with confidence.

In 2015, Cropp reached one of his biggest goals when he was elected to serve on the NJAB at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Indianapolis, Ind.

"The National Junior Angus Association was a primary factor that fed my ambition," he says. "I think they went hand in hand; the NJAA and what I was taught at home — doing more and being the best that I can be."

Later, Cropp received his undergraduate degree in animal science from Kansas State University (K-State) and was a member of the K-State livestock, wool and meats judging teams.

"One thing that I hadn't expected is that I not only would fall in love with meat judging, but also meat

science," he says.

"And that was my first exposure to the meat industry on a large scale."

Cropp found himself as a member of the meat science

club; taking more and more meat science classes. Before he knew it, Cropp found himself obtaining his master's in meat science from ISU.

"I get a lot of enjoyment out of helping students who are passionate about what we do; it doesn't have to be about meat science, just passionate about anything," he says.

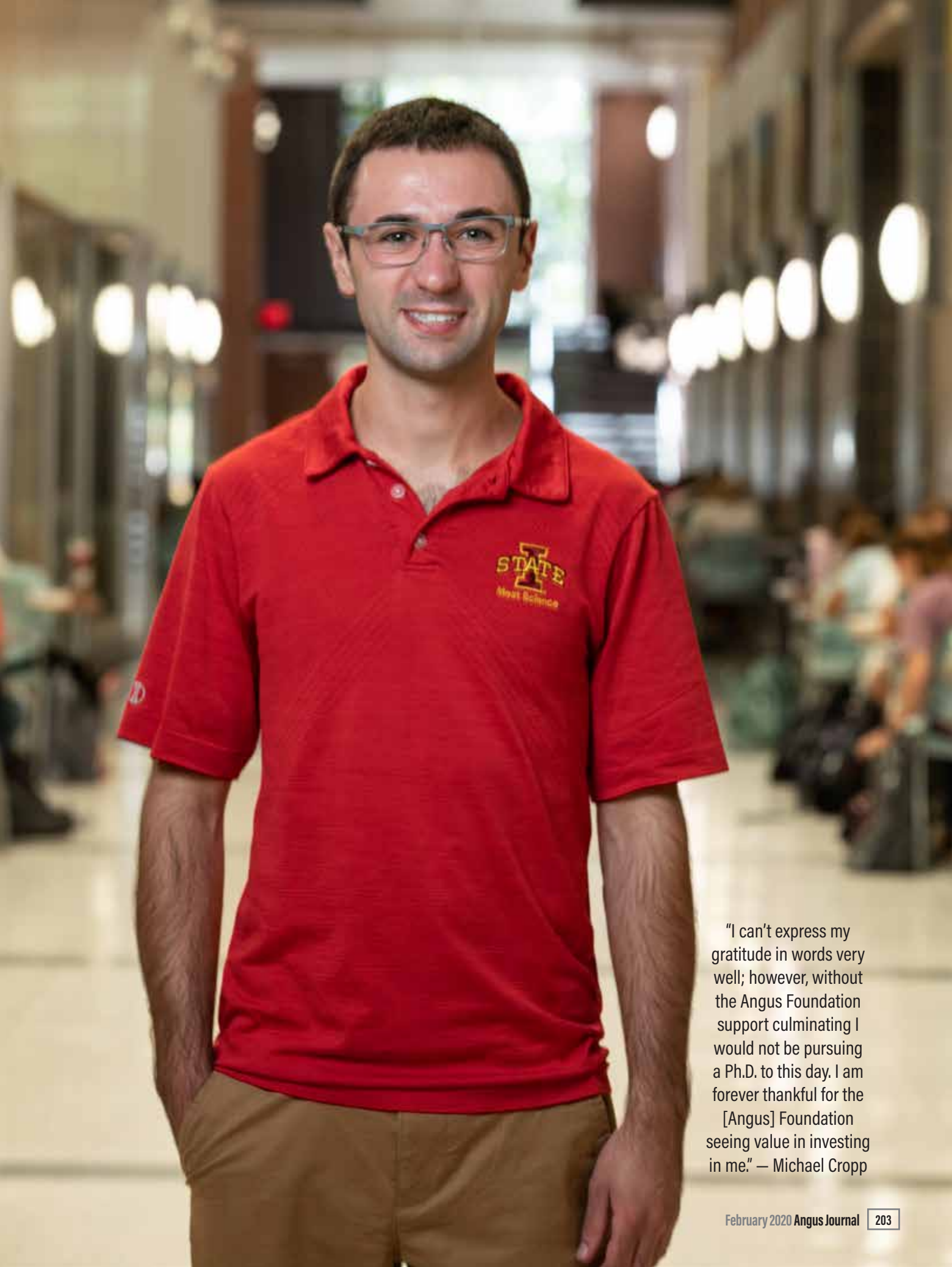
The next generation

Cropp recognizes the Angus Foundation's role in his career path and says it can also help others.

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in me through my youth and the programs that they have helped support and through the scholarships that I have been a recipient of,” he says. “I can see another generation of kids that I would like to have that same gift and opportunity that I had growing up.”

Whether it’s a conference, scholarship or program sponsorship, Cropp says he knows the value and importance of offering these programs to the next generation.

Aside from all the support personally and financially, Cropp says being involved in the NJAA truly humbled him and expanded his network across the United States.

“I can’t express my gratitude in words very well; however, without the Angus Foundation support culminating I would not be pursuing a Ph.D. to this day,” he says. “I am forever thankful for the [Angus] Foundation seeing value in investing in me.”

Cropp says it was the NJAA and that one green coat that reached out to him as a young, fairly timid boy, that put him on the path he is on today.

From teaching in the classroom, to conducting innovations that hopefully will advance technology and knowledge, there is no question Michael Cropp has proven himself as an Angus Foundation success story.

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