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Rural America: We rise

Seven lives lost ... more than 1 million acres burned ... 10,000 head of livestock perished.

The news of this horrific disaster should have spread as fast as the wildfires themselves — wildfires that ripped away the very livelihood of so many rural American families across Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and Colorado last spring.

Instead, it was a slow and constant battle by rural America to be heard, as our national news outlets were slow to respond. Despite the total devastation, it was primarily by word of mouth and social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that rural America fought to be heard by the masses when ignored by major news stations.

The hot topics discussed the morning after the evening fires were prescription drug prices, President Trump's tweets, health care, and the international Women's Day march. Although these topics were relevant, where were the headlines highlighting the lives lost, livestock perished, acres burned and livelihoods destroyed in the heartland? Sadly, it was not until several weeks to months later, that national news stations began to cover what farmers and ranchers had coined, "Our Hurricane Katrina," according to *The New York Times*.

Be it natural disasters, concerns over food nutrition and safety, or the many issues affecting producers and consumers, the reality is that stories on agriculture do not make the headlines. The time has come for rural America to rise up against a deficit we have not truly faced head on. It is time we stop preaching to the choir and start singing to the masses. It is time for us to stand up,

step up and share our truth, our way of life and our commitment to responsibly feeding the world.

We rise

Angus breeders have survived the test of time. From the Dust Bowl of 1936 to the cattle crash of 1975 to the drought of 2012 and now the fires of 2017, we, as Angus breeders and members of the agriculture community, have prevailed. We prevailed not by handouts from governments or from organizations like the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), but by hard work, sacrifice, innovation and neighbors helping neighbors through their darkest hours. Many of these farming and ranching operations have been in families for generations, supporting their own families while contributing to our economy by producing the food that feeds the world.

Yet the world does not take the time to recognize this story.

How will we rise?

Before we can inform the public, we must first educate ourselves and other members of the agriculture community about the gap in communication between producers and consumers. Our failure to communicate what we

know and understand about our agriculture practices to the consumer results in a lack of knowledge and understanding. This is the primary barrier we face every day.

If we, as Angus producers, educate one another in a systematic way, we will have the tools needed to strike up conversations with people who know nothing about agriculture. Whether we are in a grocery store, on an airplane, or even in a bank, we can be empowered to ignite conversations, share our stories and promote the truth about agriculture as supported by science.

We understand that our agriculture practices are humane, safe and eco-friendly. However, somewhere along the way from farm to fork, that message has been lost.

To bridge that gap, we can systematically educate ourselves to address these issues by using the tools available to us, such as the *Angus Journal*, the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, *Feedstuffs* magazine and the new app by the beef checkoff to provide concrete evidence to show, not just tell, our consumers how we produce our food. We can assure them that we are providing food that is safe and nutritious to feed to their families.

Conveying the message

Who are our best spokespeople for this rise?

If you ask me, the answer to this question is simple. It is the youth of agriculture, just like me, who are poised and ready to take on this challenge. The young people in breed associations like the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), FFA chapters and 4-H clubs across America are the future of the beef industry. We are your voice. We are capable of closing the gap between rural America and the rest of the world with the help of you, our mentors.

Leaders of the Angus industry are our best assets. One of the purposes of the American Angus Association's Events and Education Department, led by Jaclyn Clark, is to cultivate junior Angus members into our industry leaders of tomorrow.

My NJAA career began in 2010 when I presented my first prepared speech at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). As my knowledge and passion has increased about beef agriculture, my mission now, as a junior in high school, is to close the gap between producers and consumers.

Currently, I am a student at a Catholic high school in a suburb of Kansas City. Agriculture is not part of the curriculum, so I have embraced the opportunity to share my ag story and way of life by using the resources and experiences from my seven years in the NJAA to bring agriculture into my school's classrooms.

It has been two years since I made that commitment. Something quite remarkable occurred at the end of this past school year — evidence that my voice is being heard. For the first time ever in St. James Academy history, agriculture was granted the spotlight. I was given a full-page feature in the yearbook highlighting my passion for the agriculture industry and appreciating the way I involve my peers in my way of life. This yearbook page did two things. First, it validated my efforts. Second, it proved that those removed from the agriculture industry do not reject our way of life; they simply need an opportunity to learn about and understand it.

So, I now ask you, proud members of the Angus industry: How will you stand up, step up and share your ag story to those removed from the farm or ranch? The possibilities are endless. The resources are out there. People want to listen.

I challenge you to begin to blaze your own trails and break down the barriers. Win the war on lack of knowledge. Support yourselves and your fellow farmers and ranchers from a disaster much more detrimental than market crashes, droughts and fires. Spark up a conversation in the grocery store or on an airplane to help educate the public.

Small steps make a big difference, and together, as members of rural America, we will rise.

Editor's Note: We want to hear from all of our junior members. What's on your mind? What issues do you think are impacting production agriculture, school or your involvement with the National Junior Angus Association? Send your comments to Kasey Brown, special projects editor, at kbrown@angus.media.

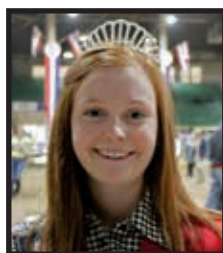
Early travels for Miss American Angus

by Kallie Knott, 2018 Miss American Angus

I am serving as your 2018 Miss American Angus, and it is my responsibility to absorb all the information I acquire from the Angus breed and the breeders, as well as communicating to the community about the livestock industry.

I started the year off right by traveling to Denver, Colo., and Fort Worth, Texas. Throughout my travels, I have learned about the breed through the regional managers, American Angus Association CEO Allen Moczygemba, Angus Foundation President Milford Jenkins, the National Junior Angus Board (NJAB), and Angus breeders all across the country.

My week in Denver started off with the Bases Loaded Sale with NJAB Foundation Director Corbin Cowles and Mr. Jenkins. After a great turnout at all the sales and being introduced by Mr. Tom Burke at the Trowbridge Family Sale, I met several juniors and breeders as they walked out of the ring with smiling faces in Stadium Arena. Congratulations to all exhibitors, and a special thank you to the queens who assisted me during the shows, as well!



To end the week, I enjoyed being at the pen and carload shows watching all the bulls and heifers walk through and analyzing their expected progeny differences (EPDs) to consider for the champion pens and carloads.

It was a long week in Denver, but the American Angus

Association and the people I met throughout my trip helped me feel welcome in the Mile High City.

After flying back from Denver, I headed to a much warmer part of the country, Fort Worth, Texas, for the stock show. During the show, I was able to meet and assist the newly crowned Miss Texas Angus, as well as walk on the red dirt handing out awards to all the exhibitors. Throughout my trip, I was able

to venture to the stockyards and watch the cattle drive before heading back to the snowy region of Indiana.

These past trips and adventures have allowed me to live in the moment with many breeders and enthusiasts of the livestock industry. I am looking forward to continuing my travels as Miss American Angus, representing the voices of the Angus breed.