

# In Their Boots

*The Angus Foundation helped foster Zeb Gray's passion for teaching.*

*by Karen Hiltbrand, American Angus Association*

If perspective were a tool, it would be one of the most crucial gadgets in Zeb Gray's toolbox. By definition, perspective is a particular attitude or way of regarding something. It has the power to either elevate a situation to a point of advantage, or adversely disadvantage.

For Zeb Gray, a beef feedyard nutritionist with Furst-McNess Company, he has utilized this mindset to assist in achieving his success. From the classroom to the cattle lot, Gray's "in their shoes," or more accurately "in their boots," viewpoint has allowed him to flourish in his ability to teach throughout the agricultural community.

"In order to be a good teacher, you have to be a good student," Gray says. "You have to know the material better every time that you teach."

So far in Gray's professional career, his humility has directed how he approaches his students — as if he were teaching himself, since he was once in their shoes.

## The junior

Gray, a sixth-generation Angus producer and Iowa native, was destined to work in agriculture and more specifically, the cattle industry.

"The only thing I thought about

while growing up was farming, raising Angus cattle or selling Angus bulls," he says.

His decision to participate in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) was attributed to his desire to show Angus cattle, he says.

"My family has a rich tradition in the Angus breed," he says. "My family has been raising purebred Angus since 1898. My dad and his dad, have had Angus cows all their life and I hope to continue that tradition."

While a member of the NJAA, Gray was elected to serve

on the National Junior Angus Board of Directors (NJAB) and wear the acclaimed green jacket.

"I think the activities outside the show ring that the Association offered helped me set a ground floor for some of my success in college for sure, and later in my career," Gray says.

Not only did the NJAA assist in developing his skill set and connect him to a huge network of people, but later the Angus Foundation provided funds to help support Gray's collegiate career through scholarships.

"You move from a point where you just want to beat the other person in the show ring or in the contest, to

now, 10 years later — those are my colleagues," he says. "It's interesting how those relationships change and life goes on and you change perspectives."

## The student

"Because of the Angus cow I decided to go to Iowa State and major in animal science," he says. "While I was in school there, I was involved in a number of extracurricular activities, the biggest one being the meats judging team and the meat animal evaluation team."

While at Iowa State Gray worked at the Centralized Ultrasound Processing (CUP) Lab measuring and interpreting carcass ultrasounds for beef producers across the country. It was experiences like working in the CUP Lab and participating on the the meats judging and the meat animal evaluation teams that inspired Gray to pursue his doctoral degree at the University of Wyoming.

Gray has positioned himself from numerous viewpoints; as the student, the Angus producer, the lab technician, the teammate and now, with the help of the Angus Foundation, the doctoral student.

"Just like a lot of farmers that I work with, I had the physical ability, I had the mental ability; but monetary funds always seem to be the biggest hindrances," Gray says. "The Angus Foundation helped in a big way

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## The teacher

While completing his doctoral degree, Gray had the opportunity to again shift roles and wear yet a different pair of shoes. This time those shoes were of an instructor in the Department of Animal Science, and the meats judging coach at the University of Wyoming.

“I guess I don’t really know where that innate desire to work with the next generation came from, but I like to see people get better; I like to get better myself,” Gray says.

One might argue Gray has always positioned himself as a teacher and influencer, thinking specifically back



to the days he wore his green coat.

“Thanks to the Angus Foundation, I got five years of experience teaching at the graduate school level,” Gray says. “I learned in order to be a good teacher you have to be a good student. You have to know the material better every time you teach, and that was a great way the Foundation aided in that process.”

Although Gray is no longer in the classroom, he still teaches ranchers and feedyard owners on a daily basis as a nutritionist.

“Every day I am interacting with cattlemen trying to help them make money in different ways,” he says. “Those skills translated over really well from the classroom to my current profession.” **AJ**

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