

Young Cattlemen's Conference

Designed to broaden young cattlemen's and women's horizons, YCC introduces them to politics, economics, a larger view of the industry and each other.

BY ANDRA CAMPBELL



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION

Attendees of the Young Cattlemen's Conference participate in a whirlwind trip that carries them from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association headquarters in Denver to Kansas to Nebraska, where they tour IBP; to Chicago, where they visit the Chicago Mercantile Exchange; to Washington, D.C., where they visit Congress and the White House. Other stops along the way include a meat plant, a cow-calf operation and a feedyard.

For the past 18 years the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) has held a weeklong tour for young cattlemen and women in order to identify and cultivate leadership for the beef industry. This tremendous opportunity, supported by IBP inc. and Continental Grain, gives young adults a whirlwind tour across the country in what has come to be known as the Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC).

In a roundabout way, YCC developed from an annual event called Swift Trip put on by Swift and Co. "During the height of packer and producer problems Swift and Company, the IBP of that era, developed a program that took sheep producers from the Western states on a two-week, all-expense-paid trip across the United States," says George Spencer, a semi-retired commercial cattle feeder and market trader who lives in Draper, Utah.

Spencer, who from 1963 to 1965 was responsible for conducting the Swift Trip and for identifying young aggressive producers, was hired away from Swift by what is now known as the NCBA. "I didn't think young cattlemen and women were being adequately recognized at that time," he says. "We needed to do something to further invigorate young people in the cattle industry."

"They usually stayed home and did chores while Dad would go to the state capitol," says Spencer, "though they didn't necessarily want to." Sensing frustration, and by virtue of the Swift Trip, Spencer set out to begin what is now known as YCC.

The idea of the program was pushed to the back of Spencer's desk until he decided in January of 1980 to resign from NCBA. At that time he asked himself, "What haven't I accomplished?" The answer came easy — YCC. In April Spencer submitted his resignation but remained dedicated to YCC. By bringing together a small group of select cattlemen, Spencer and Bill Swan, who was then vice

president of the association, conducted the first trip.

■ Broadening horizons

Spencer went on to become an officer of IBP and chairman of its foundation. He also continued to keep a close eye on the progression of YCC. "A trip such as YCC broadens young cattlemen's and women's horizons. They learn about politics and economics, and they meet other cattlemen who will remain their friends for life," says Spencer.

Marvin Kokes, NCBA's vice president of association services, says, "George Spencer and Bill Swan were the godfathers of the YCC program." Though YCC has changed considerably from that first trip in 1980, in many ways it has remained the same. "We are still trying to expose future leadership in all sectors of the beef industry — from farm to fork," says Kokes.

During the week, approximately 40 people are thrown together on a whirlwind trip that carries them from the NCBA Denver headquarters office to Kansas to Nebraska, where they tour IBP; to Chicago, where they visit the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME); to Washington, D.C., where they visit Congress and the White House. Many other stops are along the way, including touring a meat plant, a cow-calf operation and a feedyard, and listening to case studies on the beef industry presented by Continental Grain. From sunrise to sundown and beyond, the tour keeps them hopping.

"It takes me a week to recover from each trip," says Kokes, who has gone on the past five tours as a staff representative. The NCBA president-elect also attends, along with other NCBA staff members and IBP and Continental Grain employees.

"The fellowship and friendships developed on the YCC tour are like a fraternity," says Kokes. He receives e-mail about once a week from past class members and says, "There

are people who have gone through the YCC program I could call tomorrow who would give me the shirt off their back."

■ Developing leaders

With more than 400 graduates, YCC is a program highly regarded by many people — especially those who have gone on the tour. Each class elects a person from their year to serve as chairman for the next year. "They elect people who show great leadership skills and who are willing to make the huge commitment," says Kokes. Many YCC participants, he adds, have later gained industry recognition — Chuck Schroeder, CEO of NCBA; Mike Brooks; and William Powell, to name a few.

NCBA criteria is limited for YCC. They accept young adults from 25-40 years of age who are members of NCBA. "Basically it's up to the state affiliates to decide on candidates," says Kokes, "though we are looking for people with leadership potential we can groom and expose to the industry."

Each state has its own selection process and either completely absorbs the cost of the trip — \$1,500 plus travel to Denver and home from Washington, D.C. — or helps out as much as they can. "Graduates of the program go on to become our industry's leaders," says Kokes. Graduates also receive green lapel pins, which are as sentimentally valuable as a class ring.

"Most people in our industry have not been to a packing plant, have not met with a meat buyer, have not met with a meat manager at a retail store," says Kokes. "YCC provides this kind of experience."

■ Firsthand experience

"The most educational part of the trip was the combination of people involved," says Chris Nelson, a graduate and past chairman of the YCC program. Nelson says that groups from various segments of the industry — packers, feeders, seedstock producers and cow-

calf operators — contribute to making a valuable experience.

Nelson and his wife, Jessica, and their two sons, Tate and Dane, own a seedstock ranch near Visalia, Calif. They manage more than 100 head of Angus females and 200 head of commercial cows along with some stockers. He is a senior sales representative for Roche Vitamins and travels throughout the West and Southwest visiting pockets of clients for the company.

"It was an honor to be selected chairman by my peers," says Nelson. He says that, though the second trip was the same in terms of locations, it was a completely different experience due to the dynamics of different people involved.

Lenny McDonald, a commercial cow-calf operator in Gyser, Mont., and committee chairman for the Montana Stockgrowers Association, said YCC was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him. "The Montana Stockgrowers Association partly funded the trip, and it was worth money out of my pocket to go."

Leaving behind his family (wife, Amy, and children, Ty, Megan, Kirsty and Katelyn) to go to Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska and Washington, D.C., was a culture shock to the Montana native. Being able to see what the NCBA was about, to see the different aspects of the industry and to develop leadership skills made it all worthwhile.

"Being cow-calf producers, we are usually at the bottom of the totem pole," says McDonald, who appreciated visiting the feedlots and packing houses, getting to see the Chicago Mercantile and going to Washington, D.C.

"The YCC tour has been my favorite leadership experience," says Sheri Spader, past chairman of the program and member of the NCBA Executive Committee. Spader, who is the mother of three children — Jared, Brett and Alyssa — says she developed lifelong friendships and learned much



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in a short time about education and leadership.

Spader calls Rosendale, Mo., home. There she manages a cow-calf operation with her husband, Richard Spader, who is executive vice president of the American Angus Association. "We have both been in the cattle business all of our lives," says Sheri, who is also a past president of the Missouri Cattlemen's Association and has served on several different committees for NCBA. "You get an educational overview of the industry that is invaluable."

YCC is a term well-known by many individuals. In fact, at most meetings there is a get-together just for graduates of the program. Here, the green-pinned leaders get reacquainted and talk about the weeklong whirlwind experience they had — even if they can't remember which year it was.

For more information, call your state cattlemen's association or NCBA.

