

# What They Always Wanted

*Decades in the making, Foxhoven Angus rises to fulfill dad's plan, provides sons an on-farm avenue.*

*by Miranda Reiman, senior associate editor*

Brock Foxhoven didn't decide to become a cattleman so much as it was a path he was always on.

Bits of memories from here and there provide supporting evidence that it's been a lifelong calling.

As a young boy, he remembers planting a shelterbelt of cedars and red oak alongside his dad. He couldn't tell time just yet, but he knew they'd be stopping at 4:45 p.m. because that's when the cows need to be milked.

The Crofton, Neb., farm revolved around the crops and the dairy cattle, though sometimes finishing beef animals brought in extra income.

When Foxhoven was in sixth grade, his dad, Galen, took him out of school to go to an Angus bull sale, and they came back with a handful of registered heifers.

"That became my addiction right away, the cattle business," he laughs.

As Foxhoven considered "what's next" after high school, he rode along with their veterinarian to a sale in South Dakota. The likely plot was a conversation that would inevitably encourage Foxhoven toward higher education. That's when the path became more clear.

There's no way to pinpoint the moment Foxhoven decided to continue in his dad's and grandpa's footsteps on the diversified farm in the rolling hills of Cedar County. It was more of an "always there" motivation that solidified over time.



Galen Foxhoven (center) started his registered Angus herd as his family was growing — a way to possibly bring some of those children back to the farm someday. Years later, his sons Brock (left) and Justin work alongside him near Crofton, Neb.

When others went to college, the young cattleman bought pasture.

"I used other producers as my classroom," Foxhoven says. "I have a lot of great friends and mentors in the cattle business."

## For the family, by the family

If returning to the farm was the ultimate goal, it didn't take long before his dream expanded to include a South Dakota ranch girl who worked summers with him at the local salebarn. She was far more interested in horses than a Nebraska farm boy, but with a little time, that all changed.

Today Brock and Jody are almost 20 years into forever, with Tuff, Ellie

and Maci now growing into reliable backup help.

"I'm a big believer that you've got to give them responsibility to make them responsible," he says.

Up the road his brother, Justin, and his wife, Erin, are raising their children, Ian and Layla, and are partners in the operation. Three sisters and their families are within driving distance and come to help during sale season.

Dad is across the field, and is a "mastermind at farming," Foxhoven says.

One day he might be planning a new crop rotation and hauling a bull to a customer the next.

“This was his vision on how to keep the family here and give us something to build on,” Foxhoven says.

Their mom, Brenda, passed away in December, leaving the tasks of bookwork, animal records and entertaining distributed among family still wondering how they’ll do it all without her.

“She really was the glue,” he says.

## The best laid plans

The fragility of life reminds them it’s good to have goals and a plan, but it’s important to stay nimble.

Foxhoven learned that by watching his parents live through the tumultuous 1980s farm economy with all those mouths to feed, and he learned it when it didn’t rain for much of 2012.

Foxhoven learned it as his dad switched from traditional crop

rotations to add oats, sorghum-sudangrass and millet.

“He’s a thinker. He never quits thinking. He’s always on to the next thing,” Foxhoven says of his dad.

The herd started with those few purchased females, and they’ve grown by keeping replacements and buying foundation bulls, collecting and using them heavily.

The last milk cows left in 2010, but there was plenty of work to fill in. Case in point: the 470 Angus females in their pastures.

“Our goal was to cap our cow herd at 300. That’s what we decided five years ago. I don’t know what the heck happened ...” he says with a smile.

## The ‘car lot’ of cattle

If Foxhoven were running a car dealership, he wouldn’t expect every person to walk through the doors with the same sets of wants and needs. He looks at his bull offering

much the same way.

“We’ve got SUVs over here and trucks over here, and I can’t tell anybody what they need. It’s not my job as a breeder to say, “This is the type of bull you need.””

Instead, he offers choices: some are maternal, some are terminal and some do it all. Every option is solid.

“If we wouldn’t use them, we won’t sell them, that’s our philosophy,” he says.

The sort starts with eye appeal — deep culling is always based on phenotype.

“You can see it structurally: feet, legs, performance. We can pick that up with our eye,” Foxhoven says.

Numbers come after, but looking them up on paper rarely changes a selection he’s already made in the pen.

“It’s stressful thinking about, ‘What do I need two and a half years from now?’” he says.

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That's why he does it carefully.

"Dad was one of them as a kid, he taught us you do the job right the first time."

The summer heat didn't stop the father from having his son redo fence posts if they were a few inches off.

"That goes into the way we breed cattle now," Foxhoven says.

He doesn't want to have to fix a mistake.

"We don't chase extremes on anything here when we select cattle, because I know you don't know if it's a good one until four years later."

Doing the job right is even more important while staring down that timeline, he says, and it's important considering who he's doing it for.

## Customers, friends

About a dozen years ago, Scott Eisenhauer noticed something unusual as he picked replacement heifers. All the ones he kept? Bull-bred. His Foxhoven-purchased bulls were outperforming those sires he'd selected from the bull studs for artificial insemination (AI).

That's when he decided to change up his strategy.

Living just 20 miles from Foxhoven Angus, today he packs up his kids and a cooler, and the children play with the "neighbors" while he looks through the herd.

By the time sale day comes, he has his eye on a few top sires he will purchase, collect and use for AI on his 700 commercial females.

"I'm looking for more maternal traits, but with the powerful genetics that Foxhoven Angus has, you can kind of kill two birds with one stone," Eisenhauer says.

"Steers sell themselves," he says, but there's profit potential in earning more than the average on the heifers.

When bringing the cattle to the

sale barn, the "Foxhoven bred" label gives his heifers the power of reputation on his side.

Perhaps the most unexpected side benefit of buying his bulls from Foxhoven is a built-in advisor. The two text back and forth regularly, and they swap industry notes.

Foxhoven's customers come from neighboring farms and as far away as Montana, Arkansas and Tennessee. Most are commercial producers who sell calves at the auction market, but some retain ownership and a handful of others are registered breeders.

"Commercial cattlemen have been a huge support, and the feedback we get from them is what drives us forward," he says.

The family sells 100% interest in their bulls, but customers will often allow them to collect the bulls to use back in the Foxhoven program. That allows for a greater chance at sibling offerings in subsequent years, but for Foxhoven it's about ranchers having full ownership of their best genetics.

"I love that other people are successful," Foxhoven says. "That is our job, when we sell cattle."

When bulls don't make the cut, the family sells at auction in Yankton.

"We're in their shoes, too," he says.


"That day is the biggest day of their year. They work, realistically, for a couple of years and it's all over within less than 10 minutes."

Replacement-quality heifers have been topping the market there.

"We're letting the cattle talk for us," Brock says. "I was always taught, 'Keep your nose down, do the work, and when you do it right, people will find you.'"

## The calling

A part of the master plan, those cedars and oaks now shelter a farmhouse the brothers built from scratch in 2005. His own son now drives a tractor to school for FFA Week and might skip a day of school for a bull sale now and then. His wife is out working with him every day. The family gets through the busy seasons with careful balance and teamwork.

As Foxhoven tells about it all, he wears a smile that says it's turning out to be just the kind of life he imagined. This call to be a cattleman was welcomed, expected. It feels like home. 

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