

Farming is a Leap of Faith for Brian Brockman



BRIAN AND BILL BROCKMAN

Brian Brockman is only 20 years old, but he's been farming most of his life.

He started when he was five by raising Angus cattle and farming just like his dad, only it was in his make-believe world.

"When I was five waiting on the school bus to go to kindergarten, I was feeding cows with an ice bucket. I had feed bunks and everything was set up just like Dad's," he says of his make-believe world he created in the house.

Now, Brockman is living his dream - raising Angus and farming in the real-world. He's the fourth generation on Brockmere Farm located just south of Brookfield, Mo.

"Raising cattle is the only thing I've ever even thought about doing," Brockman says. "It's something I've always felt comfortable doing and knew something about."

When Brockman was a high school senior in 1992, lots of folks at Brookfield High School were surprised to hear he was staying on the farm and not going to college. After all, when you're a good student, a star athlete and homecoming king, the community expects big things. Staying home to farm wasn't what they expected.

"I'll always remember a high school teacher talking about railroad workers he knew. He said they made lots of money, but they hated their job," Brockman says. "He told me, 'Anytime you can do what you want and make a living at it you're pretty lucky.'"

"I feel lucky to be doing what I'm doing and enjoying it. I like the cattle business and working for myself."

To help prepare himself for farming, he did enroll in a one-year course at nearby Chillicothe Area Vocational Technical School in a farm and agri-business management course. It was helpful and opened his mind.

Brian is quick to credit his dad, Bill. "He is a constant source of information," he says. "We discuss everything. . . he asks me for my input and vice versa."

Brian works well with his dad and always tries to listen to him. "He's been here longer than me," he says. "If I listen to him, maybe I can learn from his experiences and avoid some of the mistakes he has made."

The biggest challenge is getting everything done right. "I had this notion if you worked hard, everything would get done," he says. "But it just doesn't happen. We work 70 hours a week and still everything doesn't get done. There's always fence

to build, weeds to mow..."

Brockman was brought up to believe in three things — St. Louis Cardinals, University of Missouri Tigers and Angus cattle.

"At first I liked Angus because that's what my family raised. Now I know why we believe in Angus. I can see the economic importance they have to the cattle business," he says.

When Brian decided to join his dad, they had to expand their farming operation. Brian purchased 30 cows and rents a farm from neighbor Don Jennings. Now, he and his dad farm 1,000 acres and are working to expand their combined herd. Brian's goals are to expand their herd of 150 cows up to 200 and to have a production sale every year.

They have already established a customer base. This year they sold 27 bulls, and could have sold a lot more, Brian says. They concentrate on low birth weight and high growth in the AI sires

they use. "Eighty percent of the bulls we sell go on commercial heifers. That's our market," he says, adding that most of the bulls are sold within a 50-mile radius.

"We have tried to make our cows a little bigger with a lot more volume," he says. "Now, we're working on their fleshing ability. These bigger cows require more corn, and we need to stay away from that."

At Brockmere Farm, calving starts January 1 and is usually done by the end of March. They artificially inseminate (AI) the first 50 cows to calve and then selectively AI other top females in the herd.

In addition to the cows, Brockman and his dad farm 1,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, hay and some oats. Brian's dad, Bill, farmed with his dad, R.G., who died in 1979. Brian's grandmother, Marguerite, still helps with farm organization and decision-making. Brockman feels fortunate to have grown up in an Angus family, which also includes his mother Debbie and sister Amy, 16.

Brockman plays an active role in the beef industry. He serves on the National Junior Angus Association's board of directors. He's also co-chairman of the Missouri Young Cattlemen's Association, serves on the advisory council for the University of Missouri's Forage Systems Research Farm, and is a director of the Linn County Cattlemen's Association.

One only needs to spend a day with the young man to witness his fondness for the cattle business and the community's fondness for him. No one's a stranger. The sight of a familiar truck elicits a smile and a wave; a friend working along the roadside causes a stop and a quick chat.

This amiable, young cattleman listens. He listens to what others say. He takes note of what other successful breeders do with their herds, then tries to see how it can apply to his own herd. This year they are running their 20 best bull calves along with their mothers in a separate pasture. They get a little extra care and attention with the hope that in the long-run they'll be more marketable. This was one pointer Brockman picked up by listening to others.

"Sitting at tie outs, I've had some of the best conversations," he says. "I've picked up what people are saying about different cattle and programs."

Brockman credits Jerry Lehmann, Platte City, Mo., as being a good advisor to him. "He has been influential in our program," he says. "He keeps his ear to the ground." In addition to Lehmann, Brockman says Tom Burke, Smithville Mo., and Dick Beck, Platte City, Mo., have been very helpful. "They see a lot more cattle than I do and are a good reference," Brian adds.



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Another breeder Brockman admires is Jim O'Neill, Logan, Iowa. Brockmere Farms has purchased several bulls and females from O'Neill over the years. "I walk through Jim O'Neill's cow herd and am just in awe," he says. "What impresses me the most is that he makes it off his cattle and he started with his dad. That's what I admire about him."

"He's a top Angus breeder that sells a lot of seedstock to Angus producers," Brockman says of O'Neill. "He's had an impact on the Angus industry, and his program doesn't just work in Iowa. If I can say that after I've been in this business for several years, I will die a happy man," he says.

Brockman's advice to young Angus breeders is to show cattle. "It's not that winning or showing is what this business is about," he says. But that experience

gives you the opportunity to meet so many different people."

A show ring experience is, in fact, one of Brockman's fondest memories. In 1992 he came home from his county fair with six championships. Eighty head of cattle exhibited at the fair, and he felt thrilled to come out on top after all the years of standing farther down the line. That same year he exhibited the champion bull

and heifer in the FFA division at the Missouri State Fair.

"Then, the next year, boom, back to reality," Brockman says. "But the ups and downs, that's part of it. That's the way life is. It does make you enjoy the ups a little more."

Brockman says farming full-time involves risks. "I still have a safety net," he says. "Mom and Dad are there to help me. With my own operation, if I screw up, if I make a wrong decision, I definitely pay the consequences. But when I see something go right or pay off, I did that too."

"This is really a leap of faith," he says. "I have spent all my life thinking about raising Angus ... wondering what I would do in that situation. Well, now I am. So I can just go out and do it."

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