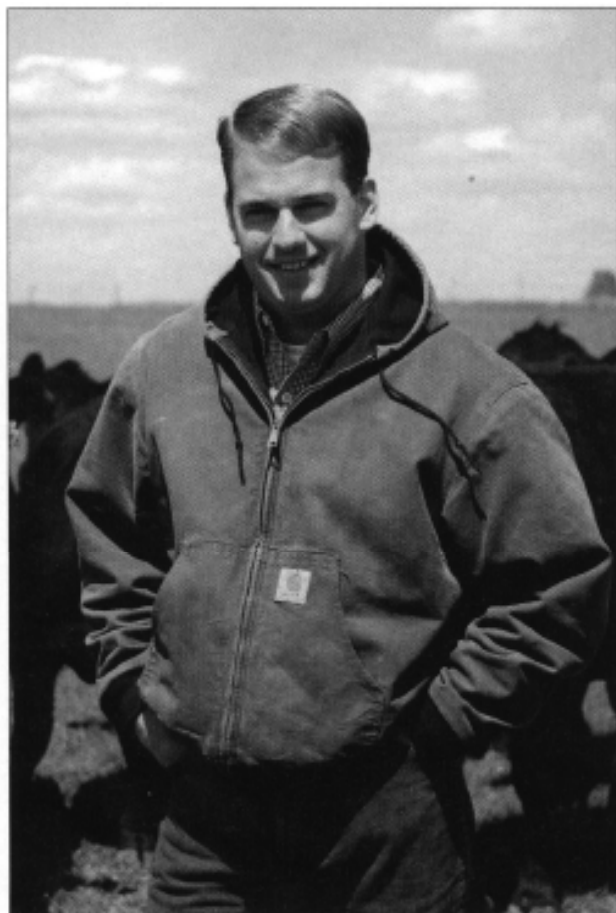


# Generation Next

Jeff Dameron plans to return to the farm someday, but first wants to explore the complex agribusiness world to develop the skills that will make him a better Angus marketer and businessman.



Before returning to the family farm full-time, Jeff Dameron wants to develop his experience and skills in business and marketing. While developing his career as a crop protection sales and marketing representative he also has the opportunity to remain active on a part-time basis with his family's farming operation.

Just like the vast corn fields spanning the Illinois horizon are the endless opportunities available today for youth interested in agriculture.

Jeff Dameron grew up on an Illinois farm where both corn and Angus cattle thrive. He was active in youth organizations including the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

"Serving on the NJAA Board of Directors I improved my communication and leadership skills," he says. "One thing I really benefited from was the development of a network of friends and resources within the Angus breed and the beef industry. I still rely on that network today and will continue to in the future."

Through this involvement, his love for the breed and agriculture developed. After graduating from college in 1994 Jeff had a tough decision to make — return to the farm or enter the job force.

Each generation finds it more and more difficult to return to production agriculture. They are facing the challenges of fewer producers and larger operations.

Although his heart belonged on the farm he knew it was not the right time. Upon graduation Jeff accepted a position as farm manager in a local farm management firm for two years and recently joined a large agricultural chemical manufacturer. He is still involved with his family's farming operation on a part-time basis.

"My experiences away from the cattle business have been invaluable. They've helped me develop a better understanding of today's agribusiness sector and the skills needed to survive in the future of agriculture," Jeff says. "I hope to one day utilize these skills and experiences when returning home to the family farm."

**Located in central Illinois** near Lexington, the Dameron Family's operation consists of 170 purebred Angus cows and a 1,200-acre grain farm. Jeff's family originally raised both commercial and Angus cattle, but as the demand for Angus grew they focused all of their attention to breeding and raising only purebred animals.

Jeff's cattle operation began in the spring of 1981 with his first show heifer. However, his love for the cattle business started at a much younger age. For several years Jeff had been helping his father every day after school.

"Little did I know of the great experiences and challenges that owning my first Angus heifer would lead to," Jeff says. "Now, 16 years later, I have 20 cows and thousands of experiences — both good and bad — all thanks to that first show heifer."

The Damerons use artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) in their management program. With their AI program they try to breed each female once. ET has allowed them to reproduce valuable genetics within their herd. They'll have about 20 to 25 embryo calves per year.

There are several reasons, other than enjoyment and economic incentives, why Jeff wants to be involved in the cattle business. He enjoys the challenges raising cattle offers as well as the satisfactions, including:

- The challenge of continually working to progress his herd through selection and breeding and anticipation of results.
- The satisfaction of seeing animals he produces be successful in competition and in his customer's herds.

As Jeff looks toward the future and to returning to the farm he foresees the herd numbers staying the same but the quality of their cows continuing to progress.

"I have always been a big believer that a successful Angus operation starts with its mothers," he says. "As we see trends and demands change it's important to have a cow herd that can produce offspring to meet the demand these changes bring."

Along with herd quality is efficiency. As margins become smaller and smaller we must be able to produce more with less, Jeff says. To achieve this he wants the operation to become more self-sufficient and less labor-intensive.

Likewise, their cattle must be more maintenance free. He says they spend a large amount of their time and resources with 5 to 10 percent of their herd — the problem animals. Therefore, if they can reduce the number of animals which require additional resources throughout the year, not only will their operation be more efficient but hopefully more profitable.

To monitor the progress and efficiency of their herd and farming operation the Damerons utilize two recordkeeping systems. They collect and report herd data to the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program. They also keep farm records using the University of Illinois Farm Business\Farm Management recordkeeping system.

"It will also be important to continue to collect information via farm records of the efficiency of our farm in order to make predictable buying and expansion decisions. No longer can we afford to make uninformed or uneducated decisions," Jeff says.

GRADING THE INDUSTRY	
Communication between seedstock and commercial cattle producers	C+
Communication between producers and feeders	B-
Communication between producers and packers	B-
Communication between producers and consumers	C+
Industry marketing methods	B
Management/animal husbandry methods	A+
Food safety	A
Environment	A+
Efficiency	B-
<b>EDUCATION:</b>	
University of Illinois	
<b>ATTENDANCE/ORGANIZATIONS BELONG TO:</b>	
American Angus Association	
NJAA Board of Directors (1991-93)	
Illinois Angus Association	

To help make educated decisions Jeff would like to use carcass data and carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs) for decision making in the future.

Purebred producers need to be using ribeye, marbling and fat thickness EPDs to breed animals with more desirable carcass traits, he says. In the future we'll continue to find new ways to evaluate data. The use of EPDs will progress and make possible the development of other tools.

**Over the years** the Dameron Family has also been active in the show ring — using it as a marketing tool. Growing up around the show ring was an important experience for Jeff and he hopes his kids will be able to have the same opportunity. Although the cattle show environment is enjoyable, he questions its viability to the commercial cattle business.

"I think the future of the beef industry is somewhat uncertain," Jeff says. "In order

for us to be more competitive with the poultry and pork industry we must do a better job of producing a consistent value-added product that is considered healthy by the consumer. These concerns and emphasis should not only translate to the type of cattle we are sending to the packers but also the cattle we are sending to the show ring. While I like to think the show ring does a good job of representing the type of cattle that both the purebred and commercial producer desire, I know many times that's not the case. If you look at the number of dams and sires represented at shows, few have ever been exhibited."

An emphasis for their seedstock operation in the future will be bull marketing. "There are not nearly as many small cattle operations in the Midwest that at one time required a bull for breeding," he says. "We will have to look at different alternatives, including retained ownership, to develop

new markets."

The Damerons market most of their cattle through an annual production sale each fall. They also consign a few animals to various state and association sponsored sales. A few bulls are placed on test throughout the country and a few females and bulls are sold private treaty during the year.

The Dameron Family's philosophy has been to support the customer. "Our success relies on their success," Jeff says.

**The future of the beef business** and the Angus breed is bright with the talents the next generation will contribute. "In order for my generation to succeed down the road we will need to manage our cattle operations as a business rather than a pastime," Jeff says. "The skills I'm developing away from the farm right now will be important tools to use on the farm."