

# Deeply Rooted, Purpose-Driven

*Shauna Hermel's strong ties to production agriculture fuel purpose, earn industry honor.*

by Kasey Brown, associate editor, Angus Beef Bulletin

Just outside of Bethel, Mo., there are 500-plus acres of lush cow country pieced together through many years. Near the Kansas-Missouri border, there's an office building with an Angus nameplate. Shauna Hermel, editor of the *Angus Beef Bulletin*® and 25-year Angus team member, knows the road between the two locations well.

Even while working alongside her own family and Angus cattle, Hermel stays connected to what her larger Angus family needs back at 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, Mo. Roots in both parts of the Angus world form her entrenched purpose to provide information to cattlemen that keeps them in business.

For this lifetime of dedication, Hermel was inducted into the 2022 Livestock Publications Council (LPC) Hall of Fame.

## Roots in the Angus industry

The daughter of beef industry trailblazers, Hermel had the inspiration to work hard and test boundaries from the start. Her mother, Elizabeth Coon (originally Moore), was one of the first women to study animal science at the University of Missouri (Mizzou) — a

fact her daughter is still proud of 60 years later. Moore served as the first treasurer of the Missouri Junior Angus Association in 1956, competed on meats and livestock judging teams, and was featured in the *Angus*

“I was born as a Cornhusker, but my folks got back to Missouri as quickly as Mom could convince Dad to come,” Hermel laughs.

They joined what became the Moore, Perry & Coon operation in partnership with Elizabeth's mother, and sister and brother-in-law, Kathleen and Robert “Bob” Perry.

When their house burned, it presented the nudge to branch out on their own to focus on what Larry and “Liz” enjoyed most — Angus cattle. They bought part of the original Moore homestead and moved 3 miles down a gravel road to begin Coon Angus Ranch.

That's where Larry started the Mark Twain Bull Test from scratch. As her dad's sidekick from an early age, some of Hermel's earliest cattle memories include watching her dad shoveling tons of cottonseed hulls into the bulls' feed troughs.

“Nobody worked harder than Dad,” Hermel recalls. “He had to pay for this place through the '80s. The test station and Aling (artificially inseminating) cows across Northeast Missouri helped with that.”

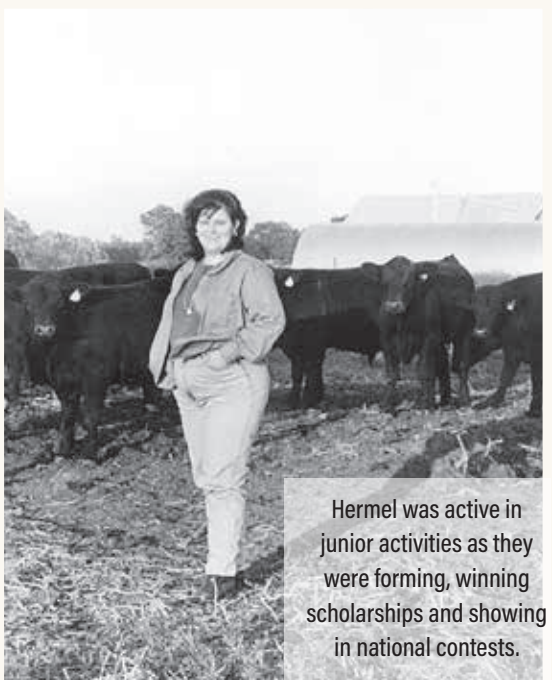
The bull test was more than just a revenue stream. Hermel's parents were both deeply invested in performance testing and how a bull affects a quality eating experience, she notes. One of their bulls, Legator,



PHOTO BY WHITNEY WHITAKER, AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

*Journal* for her efforts.

While attending the National Western Stock Show, Moore caught the eye of Kansas Hereford breeder Larry Coon. The two met officially at Kansas State University (K-State), where they were both pursuing master's degrees. They married shortly after and moved to Dawson County, Neb., where Larry took a role as extension agent.



Hermel was active in junior activities as they were forming, winning scholarships and showing in national contests.



Todd and Hermel (from left) spend as many weekends on the farm as possible, where Larry still operates with Susan and Russell, and their children Kathryn and Jacob.

PHOTO COURTESY OF COON ANGUS RANCH

earned the title of Super Certified Meat Sire long before expected progeny differences (EPDs) and the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) program were born.

It helped tie a performance basis to a love for showing cattle through the Missouri Junior Angus Association, 4-H and FFA. An American Angus Auxiliary scholarship winner, Hermel was active in junior activities as they were forming. She remembers showing in the National Showmanship Contest the year the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) began.

“I loved the cattle. I loved the people. It’s just a lifestyle you never want to end,” she says.

### Proving herself with words

Some of her most cherished childhood memories are family hot dog roasts over bonfires built clearing pastures near “the creek.” They cooked over the fire and read Thornton W. Burgess books where stories of life were told through

animals. This sparked her love of words and only enhanced her strong love of God’s creatures. She and her brother, Russell, now in their 50s,

can still quote the book characters and the stories they conveyed.

Her love of FFA prepared and extemporaneous speaking also steered her toward using words to communicate about the agriculture industry.

Hermel pursued a bachelor’s in ag journalism at Mizzou, where she knew she was in the right field when she did well in an editing class taught by a “guru of style,” Don Ranley. She still holds that niche of being an excellent grammarian.

“He taught us that grammar was important to writing to understand. We fail as a communicator if the reader doesn’t understand it,” Hermel says.

Her mind is a mix of right and left brain, as she says she loves crunching numbers and studying research projects, but she has the rare ability to break down technical information into practical pieces.

She started honing that skill at school while working for the Ag

Information Department at Mizzou’s College of Agriculture.

“I got to edit, then write news releases on research advances within the college, and I was allowed to help with some of the first desktop publishing,” she recalls.

To keep that position full-time, she needed a master’s degree.

Hermel had all intentions of returning to Mizzou for that job, but further study at the University of Wisconsin–Madison was a chance to see if she could handle life outside her comfort zone.

The summer in between was spent at public relations firm Bader Rutter, where she learned from industry giant Lyle Orwig. She attributes one of her greatest career lessons to that experience: Always ask enough questions to make sure you understand.

“That holds true for asking questions at the beginning of a task or asking questions of your source when writing a story,” she says. “It was a great point to learn early in my career.”

While in Wisconsin, she changed course again — she met Todd Hermel.

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## National verticals

A tall Minnesota farm boy with shared values and interests changed her sights from returning to Mizzou to finding a position in the Twin Cities metro. That would allow the couple to join his family’s farm with 30 commercial gilts after their wedding in

November 1990.

At the time, the publishing job market was tight. However, she took a temporary position filling in for a secretary at *National Hog Farmer* and *BEEF Magazine* to get her foot in the door. It was a risk that paid off.

She went back home at Thanksgiving, and by Christmas she had a full-time job offer as assistant editor splitting time between both publications.

Hermel credits *BEEF’s* managing editor, Joe Roybal, with her first opportunity to write.

“Joe saw me as a writer even in the temporary position,” she recalls appreciatively.

Each publication had distinctive personalities, voices and styles, so she created a stylebook to keep them straight. It soon became a resource used by the whole editorial staff.

Hermel has never been afraid to take on the unglamorous, nitty-gritty stories. Her first article of note was

on dead pig disposal. She enjoys the difficult, technical subjects. She says she’s always been interested in research, and that’s proven advantageous as an editor.

“Those research projects would be the feature articles in about two years,” she explains.



PHOTO BY FAYE SMITH, ANGUS JOURNAL INTERN

## Coming home

After eight years in Minnesota, the opportunity to come back to Missouri opened. *Angus Journal* Editor Jerilyn Houghton had started the magazine down the path of production-oriented journalism that rivaled the national verticals, but she was leaving.

Knowing how much the Angus breed meant to Hermel, Roybal let her know about the position.

Todd laughs, “Shauna always kept putting pictures of black cattle in *BEEF*, even though they wanted pictures of colored cattle.”

While the couple operated a

commercial hog operation, they weren’t excited about changes happening in the pork industry. They were dragging their feet on investing in a large-scale confined farrow-to-finish operation. Even though it meant uprooting Todd from the farm, he was supportive. When she got the job, they moved south.

“I always saw Angus breeders as being the leaders in the industry, and CAB kind of proved that,” Hermel says. “Plus, it was also coming back home to the people I grew up with, like the people I showed cattle with in the junior Angus associations. When I was growing up, Mom and Dad were very active in county cattlemen’s associations. Our

Angus friends — that was family. Being able to come back and write for Angus was coming back to try to help our family and the broader Angus family continue to thrive in the beef industry.”

Hermel joined the *Angus Journal* in September 1997. Combined with then-Associate Editor Angie Stump Denton the two were a powerhouse of ideas and work ethic. Denton remembers many nights burning the midnight oil at the office, but Hermel adds that for 10 years, together they accomplished incredible growth for Angus Productions Inc. (API), now known as Angus Media.

“I enjoyed the hours I spent with her in her office brainstorming ideas of how we could better serve Angus breeders,” Denton says. “She was always thought-provoking. She stimulated me and made me better, and helped make Angus Productions better with all of her ideas through the years. There are a lot of things that Angus Media does today that started as Shauna’s ideas.”

She was hired as editor of the *Angus Journal*, but shortly after, the *Angus Beef Bulletin* shifted from the Association’s four- to eight-page newsletter for commercial cattlemen to a full-fledged magazine. With the change came an expansion of Hermel’s responsibility for editorial.

The new web marketing department offered an opportunity to provide content quickly to breeders and filled ever-expanding books in the mid-2000s.

“In a way, we were the first to do web-first content,” Hermel laughs, explaining that meeting coverage websites went online as fast as possible — often at the expense of sleep — and then would get pulled into the print publications when space called for it.

And it was called for often.

One issue had 311 pages of editorial alone, and many others came in just under that. When a sale book would get sold near the publishing deadline, Hermel and Denton might have to come up with 100 pages of editorial in a week or two to keep the editorial-to-advertising ratio in check.

## Forward for the readers

Hermel embraces change when it serves the readers, and says she’s grateful leadership believes

in conducting readership studies.

“We need to provide information how and where our readers need it,” she says.

She created the *Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA*, an all-digital publication to supplement the printed magazine, and the *AJ Daily*, a daily e-newsletter for the *Angus Journal*’s readership.

The meeting coverage websites grew to include five meetings, several topic websites and a virtual library.

Hermel sees plenty of opportunity in new media.

“Digital can let us create a level of storytelling that engages,” she says. “You can write with passion, but it’s something else to hear producers themselves. That can make you feel like you are in someone’s living room three states away.”

Hermel doesn’t do her work for awards, but she’s certainly earned many of them in her pursuit to communicate relevant information to cattlemen.

She led the editorial team to win the coveted LPC James Flanagan Award for most improved publication twice with the *Angus Beef Bulletin*. She earned the Master Writer recognition from the Ag Communications Network (ACN) and numerous writing and photography awards from both organizations. She’s been an LPC board member and was program chairman for Ag Media Summit.




PHOTO BY WHITNEY WHITAKER, AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

She led three complete publication redesigns in one year — an incredible feat.

Her passion for reader experience led to splitting the editorial team in 2018 to focus on differences in audience needs. Julie Mais came in as editor of the *Angus Journal*, and Hermel shifted her focus to grow resources for commercial cattlemen.

In Hermel’s 25 years at Angus Media, she’s seen an immense amount of change in the communications business and certainly in the American Angus Association and its entities. She remains incredibly committed to the Angus family, both immediate and nationwide.

When the going gets tough — and it has — her loyalty and work ethic get the job done because of her deep Angus roots. 

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