

by Mark McCully  
CEO, American Angus Association



## The right influence

*In a 14-year-old's mind, what is important? What influences the decisions she will make and how she will react?*

In the digital age, social media platforms have become an integral part of the lives of millions, especially among the younger generation. The average teen spends seven hours and 22 minutes each day looking at screens, up two hours per day since 2015. The term “social media influencer” was hardly a thing 10 years ago.

Today, online personalities like Charli D’Amelio have more than 150 million followers on TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. These influencers are setting trends around fashion, dance and even food choices with our youth.

While some influencers promote positive messages and encourage self-confidence, others create unrealistic image standards, promote materialism and consumerism, and have an overall negative effect on mental health.

Frankly, it can be scary to think about the power of influencers on our youth. To me, it puts even more emphasis on the importance of the American Angus Association’s youth programs and reinforces the value of the Angus Foundation to support these efforts.

Events like the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), Raising the Bar and the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference provide platforms for young

individuals to engage in productive and meaningful activities. We foster personal growth, leadership development and education. We develop essential life skills such as responsibility, teamwork and communication. Youth are getting a deeper understanding of the agricultural industry and learning firsthand the importance of hard work and perseverance.

### Lessons learned

Is it really making a difference? I’d argue it is. I recently received an email from a 14-year-old National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member that gives me extreme hope about where things are headed.


This young lady had done her own entries for the NJAS and made an error. She entered the wrong registration number and didn’t recognize the error until the late entry deadline had passed. Our rules don’t allow for a substitution entry past the deadline, and therefore she was not able to show. The grandfather of this young lady hoped to find an exception and sent me an email. I empathized with their circumstance, but explained our rules and why an exception was not possible.

The next day, I received a response from the young lady thanking me for our time. She took full responsibility for the mistake, committed to making it a learning opportunity and shared that she would

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not let this one instance damper her excitement for participating in future Angus events. There is no doubt this young lady has been surrounded by excellent influences and is on her way to great things. She handled the situation with maturity beyond her years.

This is just one example of how junior programs can be a positive influence on young people. If the Angus family is going to be the right influence, we must make the commitment to do so — choosing hard lessons over easy answers, integrity over winning and purpose over status quo. Our future is too important not to get it right. 

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