



One Strong

Shoulders back, show stick poised, borrowed heifer set: Sydney Wilson from Nottingham, N.H., steps onto the green chips as the first representative from her state to compete in the prestigious National Junior Angus Show Showmanship Contest since the early 1980s. In fact, during opening ceremonies she walked the ring solo as the single New Hampshire competitor in Madison.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

“It was intimidating when we were lining up by states,” Sydney says. “Everyone else was in a big group with matching shirts, and I was just by myself. I figured nobody would cheer for me since my mom was the

only one in the crowd from home. But once I got in there the crowd was so kind.”

The whooping and hollering for Sydney was deafening. The Angus family quickly enveloped her in

their kindness at her first NJAS.

Sydney arrived in Madison almost exclusively for showmanship but also gave judging and extemporaneous public speaking a whirl.

“We actually flew here, it would

have been a 21-hour drive,” Sydney explains. “That is about five hours longer than the people from New York drove.”

A long, hot drive would have proven hard on both people and cattle. The decision to leave animals at home was solidified by the fact that Sydney and her mom Louann lacked a caravan for the drive.

“That was a lot of miles to drive on our own without anyone to help if we broke down or something,” Sydney says. “But I am trying to convince my mom to bring animals with us next year though.”

It all began with I do

Sydney’s dad, Steve, had always wanted Angus cattle, so for one of their anniversaries, her mom purchased some heifers.

“They started their farm and showing cattle, it has been full steam ahead ever since,” she says.

Louann was instrumental in keeping the New England Angus Association thriving in the 1980s, before Sydney was born. The whole time Louann was pregnant, she continued to attend cattle shows and jokes that Sydney did not have a choice other than to eventually show cattle.

“I am very thankful my parents started out before I was born and brought me into this world,” Sydney says. “Tom Burke was actually the one who bought my NJAA membership for my mom as a baby gift when she

was still pregnant. You could almost say Burke is to blame for all of this.”

Traveling, fitting and showing with her mom is one of Sydney’s favorite past times. A whiz with clippers, Louann is a hair dresser for people and cattle alike. She has traveled all over the country fitting animals for shows large and small. Louann used to travel the entire show circuit in their region, keeping her jumping from one show to the next all summer long.

“There are people who sometimes

want their cattle shown on the circuit but don’t want to take them,” Sydney says. “We take a couple outside cattle into our herd every year and we show them alongside our own. People know that we travel the circuit pretty heavily in the summer and that we will do a good job with their animals.”

Trying their hand with lowlines, AOBs and Simmentals only intensified the family’s love for Angus cattle. Sydney mainly grew up showing cattle in 4-H after the

New England Angus Association dissolved years ago.

“We do not have an adult or a junior board in the New England region anymore, so it is a little tricky staying in the loop for Angus things,” Sydney says. “I actually talked to the old board to get submitted for the showmanship contest at the NJAS this year.”

The forgotten states

New England is made up of six states: New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Sydney says many people lump New York in there, but they have their own association and seem to be thriving.

“I guess I am here on behalf of both my state and the New England region,” Sydney says. “It is neat to come down here and show people that we do have cattle and that showmen actually know

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what they are doing in our area.”

Sydney says the typical comment from a judge out of the Midwest at an East Coast Angus show sings praises to the quality of cattle lining the ring. Though the shows are smaller, the quality is outstanding.

“That is always nice to hear when someone comes to our shows,” Sydney says. “We usually bring someone new in every year, we have had judges from all over. It is fun to surprise people when they come up here with the cattle we are raising.”

Sydney and her family are excited about the cattle they have in their string this year, one of their best calf crops to hit the ground. This fall will find them out at bigger shows than they have traditionally attended.

Many of the shows the Wilson family attend are in the New England area, mainly in Maine and New Hampshire. However, as Sydney is about to age out of the junior shows, they have branched out to New York for more open show opportunities.

Sydney mainly showed in 4-H since FFA was not typically affiliated with the showing side of livestock. Last year she aged out of her 4-H club, but still has another year in the NJAA.

Advocating

Last year Sydney traveled the country as the New Hampshire state FFA president. She had the distinct honor of seeing how other states were running their FFA and agricultural programs. She enjoyed getting to compare everything to all that she grew up around.

“You have to be really diverse in agriculture if you want to be successful in New Hampshire,”

Sydney explains. “You cannot just have one commodity. It is hard to support a large commercial herd in New Hampshire mostly because we are lacking in space.”

The college sophomore attends New Hampshire Technical Institute where she is getting her general education classes out of the way before transferring to pursue a degree in agriculture. She notes how under-represented agriculture is in colleges in her state.

The University of New Hampshire, the land-grant college in the state, boasts the highest tuition in the nation. They have also lost a lot of their emphasis on agriculture, disseminating their Angus herd as well as their hog barns, now only leaving them with a dairy farm and a horse operation on the campus.

“Our main job as producers and

as American Angus Association members is not just to have quality animals and genetics but also to communicate with the public,” Sydney says. “We all know the biggest issue in agriculture today pertains to the miscommunication between consumers and producers.”

Sydney works at a farmer’s market and was asked by a customer if she used pesticides on her beef. She figures that if someone knows what a pesticide actually is, then they could answer that question for themselves.

“It is about teaching people that the products we produce, especially beef, are safe to consume,” Sydney says. “And telling them about all the things that goes along with raising a happy and healthy animal.”

She urges producers to talk to just one person a day about what it is they do for a living.

“It is a big job for us as an industry,” Sydney says. “As for the younger generation of producers, our job is to teach people in the future about what it is we do and what all that entails.”

It is evident in the way Sydney talks about agriculture with such a fiery passion that she is already a strong advocate for the industry. Her career ambitions have fluctuated from teaching agriculture in the classroom to diving deeper into genetics. Though, wherever she transfers, she plans to pursue a degree in agricultural business and communications.

“I like talking to people about what we do in agriculture every day,” Sydney says. “I also like going to fairs and talking to people and seeing what everyone is doing.”



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Sydney firmly believes in continuously striving to learn more and progressing agriculture.

"We are changing a lot, especially in beef and the Angus breed," Sydney says. "Teaching people about what we do is about the only way we can move forward in the future."

A job with the department of agriculture in a communications role combines the two areas Sydney loves most: talking with consumers as well as producers.

West of the Mississippi

As an East Coast breeder, Sydney is intrigued by the differences between cattle west of the Mississippi and those in her region. One of the most notable is the amount of "show" weight the Midwest packs on.

"When we are taking animals to show in Louisville or somewhere in the Midwest, we have to put on a lot more weight on our animals," Sydney explains. "It's not that our animals are underweight, they just don't typically carry as much show weight up here."

Fans of moderately-sized animals, Sydney has noted the animals are a bit bigger out west.

"We cannot really bring animals in from out west and show them here because it is just a different body style preference," Sydney says. "It is an entirely different look really."

Sydney's interest in the genetic side of Angus cattle lends itself to trying new crosses with bulls from out west with her own cows to see what they get. She enjoys taking virtual tours and going to national shows to see animals she has only heard about until a few years ago.

"It was not until a couple years ago that I had the opportunity to see animals at national shows and see how they were different for mine," Sydney recounts. "Actually being able to see the quality of animals at the NJAS and at regionals is just so interesting."

Walking through the barns at the NJAS, Louann notes how older genetics are coming back into the show pen. With so many high-quality animals lining the barn in Madison, Sydney says she would gladly put any one of them in her own herd.

"In New England we try and keep up with the trends as best as we can," Sydney says. "I don't want people to think we are behind up here. People forget about us sometimes."

In the past few years, embryo transfer (ET) and sexed semen have become normal procedures for New England producers, just like it has anywhere else in the country. Sydney has also seen in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and new methods of ET grow in adoption in her area.

"It is just nice to see that animals in New England are competitive against animals from all across the country," Sydney adds. "Though we do not have a ton of specifically Angus breeders out here, we are also not lacking in Angus cattle."

Unfathomable generosity

Competing on a national stage is nerve-racking enough without the added stress of borrowing an animal for the toughest showmanship contest in the nation. Promptly after arriving in Madison the Saturday of the NJAS, Sydney's showmanship heifer plans fell through.

With only two days to find a replacement, Sydney did her best not to panic while combing through her contacts at the show who might be willing to lend her an animal.

"Anna King from New York was so kind to let me borrow one of her heifers for showmanship," Sydney says. "I am so appreciative of that and how New York has been willing to take me under their wing. It was nice to know at least a couple people."

The simple generosity and kindness Anna displayed to Sydney was seen all through the barns throughout the entire show. Something Sydney loves to witness was the dedication of the juniors to their projects.

"It is cool to see the future of our industry, the kids, taking charge of it at such a young age so they will be more established and ready for the future," Sydney says. "Especially for someone whose parents did not grow up doing all of this."

Though Sydney did not make the showmanship finals, she was just happy to represent her state and the New England region.

"Coming to nationals I was nervous and intimidated by all that was going on and then having people soothe my fears a little bit has been fun," Sydney adds. "Having people be so nice and generous is just how the Angus industry works, we really are just a big family." 🐾