

A FIRM Foundation

by Becky Mills, field editor

Young Tennessee part-timer makes the transition to full-time cattleman.



When you take a leap of faith, the number one rule is to make sure you're on firm footing. Matthew McBride did just that in October 2017 when he left a career in the insurance business to become a full-time cattleman. Even with all the uncertainties of the cattle business, McBride knew he had it covered.

Family matters

For starters, there is family support.

"My dad said he was willing to invest in me," says the Manchester, Tenn., cattleman.

His father, Mark, still works full-time off the farm, so for now, he and Matthew's mom, Carol, pay Matthew a salary as farm manager of the 150-cow, 700-acre Angus operation. Mark plans to retire in five years, however, and by then, McBride Angus needs to be self-sufficient.

The support from Matthew's parents isn't new. Whether it is with their other sons — Andrew, whose passion is music but who currently works on the operation; or Stephen, who is getting his doctorate in ag leadership at Purdue — Mark says, "We've always tried to feed their interest."

In the case of Matthew, that was livestock. Time spent with Carol's family in Iowa sparked his passion. At the start, the McBrides bought sheep for Matthew's 4-H and FFA projects. When they realized his love of livestock wasn't going away, in 2002 they bought two registered Angus heifers from Carol's brother, Allen Henry. This was followed by ten bred cows with calves by their side, also from Henry. They then purchased a small farm near their home in west Tennessee.

Still, Matthew, who is now 33, never imagined he would have the opportunity to raise cattle full-time.

"Unless you inherit a farm, it is almost impossible for young people to get into farming," he says.

His plan was to follow his father into the insurance business, retire in his 50s and raise cattle as a hobby.

However, while he was earning his ag business degree at the University of Tennessee at Martin, Matthew had the stroke of fortune to meet Amanda,



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another reason he's been able to pursue his cattle passion. They married in 2010, while Matthew worked in insurance and Amanda worked as a registered nurse.

By then, both sets of McBrides had relocated to central Tennessee because of their jobs — Matthew about an hour away from his parents. He spent weekdays in the insurance office and weekends helping with the cattle. At first, that didn't work too well.

"He was gone all the time," Amanda says. "That really cut into our family time." Then, in 2012, the young couple bought seven cow-calf pairs of their own from Robert Elliott and Sons and the situation improved. Amanda says, "I started to take an interest in the cattle and follow Matthew to the farm."

"We changed the whole game plan," Matthew says. "We made the decision to revamp the herd."

Before, all the breeding was by natural service,

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Meating a need



How's this for timing? Matthew and Amanda McBride rolled out their freezer locker business in October of 2019, before COVID-19 sent consumers into a meat-buying frenzy this spring. By June they'd already marketed 18 head of cattle through their fledgling enterprise, and their customers want more.

While it looks like the Manchester, Tenn., couple predicted the pandemic, that's not the case. Matthew says, "The meat market gives Amanda and I an opportunity for additional income, so we can work toward owning a majority share of the operation."

Matthew also says it gives them a salary for Amanda. "Her expertise is more valuable on the farm rather than working a 12-hour shift away."

Max Runge, Auburn University ag economist, says the freezer locker business is a good move. "It is a very positive thing. Typically, young producers don't have a lot of equity when they're getting started in any agri-business, and this will help them build it."

The freezer locker business also gives McBride Angus a way to add value to the cattle they remove from their seedstock operation because they don't meet their standards for structure, performance or disposition. "We know they'll still provide a superior eating experience," says Matthew. If a young cow is open at preg-check time, she goes into the meat business, too, after 60 days on feed.

Runge gives this practice another thumbs up. "In this situation, the ones that aren't going to improve the genetics of the herd are still very well-managed, and make very good meat animals."

Matthew and Amanda buy the finished cattle at fair market value from McBride Angus, have them processed locally, bring the beef back to the farm and sell it in halves, quarters, variety packs, bundles, or even by the cut.

"We've had nothing but compliments," Amanda says. "We're already seeing repeat customers. They're really liking it."

"We have a huge waiting list for ground beef," Matthew says. "It has paid off already."

McBride says it also gives them flexibility with their purebred operation. "If there is a downturn in the seedstock business because of the economy, we can put more animals in the meat market and sell less as purebreds."

Once again, Runge says they have the right idea. "In any kind of ag production, there is uncertainty. This helps spread the risk."

but Matthew took charge of selecting artificial insemination (AI) sires and synchronization protocols.

Herd health was next. "Amanda's expertise in the health world is invaluable," he states. Now, she has her Master Beef Producer and Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certifications and provides an extra pair of skilled hands at vaccination and deworming time. The couple also attended AI school in March 2017, and now not only breed their own cattle but breed for other producers, too.

By 2017, when Matthew was eyeing a career change, Amanda says, "At that point I was 100% supportive. We were in it together and I was excited and ready to begin. It's hard work, but a labor of love. I'm thankful we took the step of faith to farm full-time." During the transition, their family continued to expand, too, with the addition of Meredith, 6, and Joanna, 1.

Mark McBride is thankful for Matthew's transition to full-time seedstock breeder, too. "It has been great to see Matthew live his dream," he says. "I never dreamed we'd get to farm together."

Confidence counts

In 2013 when Matthew was trying to up their cattle marketing game, he reached out to Kent Brown, who managed the Duck River Angus Classic Sale in Columbia, Tenn. In addition to their seven cow-calf pairs, Matthew and Amanda were developing the young bulls from his parents' 30-cow herd at their place. After going through the cattle, Brown invited the McBrides to consign a bull and cow-calf pair.

The 18-month-old natural-service-sired bull brought \$4,000 — twice what Matthew and Mark expected. "We hit a home run. That gave us the confidence in our ability to raise cattle," says Matthew. It also made them loyal consignors to the Duck River sale.

In addition, Matthew's work in the insurance field gave him valuable experience. "I managed the office and payroll, understood customer service and set goals. That gave me the confidence to make the change."

Silent partner

This past February, McBride Angus had their first production sale, averaging \$3,007 on 19 bulls and \$2,265 on 10 females. "We used the [Angus Media sale book] design and targeted mailing list," Matthew says. The

result was 2,500 producers in a 100-mile radius received the sale book. “That paid for itself. Even if they didn’t buy a bull, it gave them a chance to look through our [sale book] and see our cattle.”

McBride is also a fan of the American Angus Association’s Beef Leaders Institute (BLI), which he attended in the summer of 2019. BLI is a resource for producers from age 25 to 45, and is designed to provide insight into all segments of the beef industry.

McBride says it hit the mark. “We got different ideas from producers and industry leaders, and learned about different marketing strategies,” he says. “We saw the whole industry, pasture to plate. Now I understand the whole process. Going to the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) headquarters was the icing on the cake. That’s probably what encouraged me to get into the meat selling business.”

McBride recognizes the work the American Angus Association and CAB have done to brand Angus products. “It is extremely helpful, as a producer, to

have them working in our corner,” he says.

He adds that Association Regional Manager Alex Tolbert is a great resource, especially when it comes to marketing.

In turn, Tolbert says McBride is doing his part. “I think one of the reasons Matthew has been successful is he is passionate about the Angus breed and Angus cattle.” He adds, “He has a genuine desire to do well, he’s a smart guy, he works hard at it and he’s doing all he can to make sure it goes well. I applaud him for it.”

Faith first

Even with the family and Association support, McBride is still quick to give the final, and most important, credit where it is due.

“We give God the glory. We have been so blessed.”

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