

Rischi Sharma enjoys an afternoon in the sun with his dogs and Angus cattle.

FROM INDIA TO INDIANA

The son of an immigrant, Rischi Sharma embodies his father's Indian heritage, his mother's Indiana roots and their love for Angus cattle.

by Julie Grimes Albertson



Rischi Sharma wants to know everything there is to know about Angus cattle, and he's not afraid to ask questions. As the Indiana Junior Association president, he's also more than willing to answer questions.

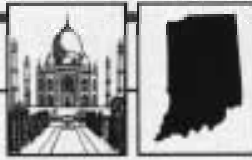
"I go to shows and ask people what they feed their calves to get them to their peak, or how they trim them, for instance. I'm always asking people something," says Sharma.

Rischi's natural curiosity and love of Angus have given him success in and out of the show ring.

Rischi's 19, is the oldest son of Dr. Om and Rita Sharma of Williamsport, Ind. Their daughter Reena, 17, and son Sean, 16, share their oldest brother's appreciation for Angus.

The Sharmas began showing 11 years ago, Rischi's first year in 4-H. "My mom always says that I'm the guinea pig of the family because I'm the oldest," says Rischi.

While Rita Sharma showed cattle at an early age, Dr. Sharma, a veterinarian, had no previous experience in the show ring. "My mom says that once when she was gone and I was too little to trim calves myself, my dad thought he'd help out. He took the flathead clippers and shaved all the hair off my calf. When we took



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that calf to the county fair, everyone asked if it was a new fad to shave all the hair off," recalls Rischi.

However, while Dr. Sharma may have known little about showing cattle, his expertise as a veterinarian has certainly served the family well. Dr. Sharma traveled to the United States from his native India to attend the University of Illinois at Champaign. There he received his master's and doctoral degrees in veterinary medicine. While attending the university, he met and married Rita.

The Sharmas moved to Lexington, Ky., where Dr. Sharma was professor of endocrinology at the University of Kentucky. All three children were born in the Bluegrass State. In 1977 they moved back to Rita Sharma's family farm, Mehaffey Land and Cattle Co., near Williamsport, Ind. It is there that they now reside and raise 50 head of Angus.

Angus haven't always been the breed of choice at Mehaffey Cattle Co. Rita Sharma's grandparents had a herd of highly respected Herefords. However, Rita wanted to show an Angus heifer in 4-H and thus began the Angus tradition.

While both parents have much experience working with cattle, Rischi also relies on other people to teach him the in's and out's of the show ring.

"Four or five years ago I started using clippers and started teaching myself and watching other people to see how they do things. The first calf I trimmed I just took the clippers and went straight up on its neck. Even though there was a line where the shoulder was, I thought I had done a great job," says Rischi, "But now when I go to shows, I watch other people showing and trimming their calves, so I can pick up little tips."

Rischi's most recent success came at the 1991 Indiana State Fair when Sharma was chosen top 4H Angus showman. He credits some of his showmanship success to his parents' creative ingenuity.

"When we were young, my parents used to have us put a halter on and walk around the yard, pretending to show each other," says Rischi. "I thought it was the dumbest thing, but it really worked."

You learn by doing — that's how Rischi Sharma and his family have approached fitting and showing cattle. They show only cattle they raise and do all the preparation themselves.

Angus are a big part of Rischi's life, but he also has plans to become an attorney. Sharma is a sophomore at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Ind., and is majoring in political science with a minor in French. While at the liberal arts college he tries to educate his friends and fellow students about cattle.

"When I was being interviewed by Wabash College, someone asked if I thought I was going to be out of place since I'm from a small farming community, live on a farm and show cattle. At first it bothered me a little, but once I got there, I found my experience was something I added to Wabash. It was something that I had to give."

As a cattleman, Sharma is in the minority at Wabash. He sometimes finds himself defending his way of life. "In my nature class which dealt with environmental issues, I had debates with classmates regarding ozone depletion and methane production by cattle. They mistakenly believed cows to be responsible for a lot of the world's methane production and for the destruction of the rainforest."

Rischi not only defended cattle production to his classmates, he studied the subject at the library and backed up his position with facts.

"I've proven that you don't have to go to an agricultural school to have a part in agriculture. I talk about my cattle to people all the time, and I don't feel self-conscious. I have pictures of my cows hanging in my room at school, and people are really curious."

After graduating from Wabash, Sharma plans to attend either Northwestern

University in Chicago or Indiana University in Bloomington for law school.

But once he's received his law degree, Sharma expects to come home to his family's farm in Williamsport. "I know I'll come back here. I want to live on this farm and work with our Angus cattle. My mom always says, once you're old and rich, you can come back and do anything you want."

Sharma's love for his family and his family's farm is evident. "When I went to college, I didn't have a full appreciation for the farm. But I couldn't wait to come home and start working with the cattle, I just dearly love it. Being away made me realize everything that I have here."

Sharma's love of cattle led him to become involved in the Indiana Junior Angus Association. He currently serves as president.

Rischi works hard to keep the Indiana juniors involved and enthusiastic. "I encouraged our juniors to work toward the sweepstakes award at the National Junior Angus Show." That encouragement must have helped as the young men and women from the Hoosier state placed second in state display.

A highlight for the Indiana juniors was the team sales contest. Team members Sean Sharma, Chad Wilson and Jill Sommers placed first in the intermediate division.

When asked how the Indiana juniors realize success as a group, Sharma has a definite answer. "It is all due to our families. You could have the best leader ever, but the job couldn't be done without great families."

Rischi hopes to continue to use his leadership abilities by seeking a spot on the NJAA board of directors and as an Indiana Beef Ambassador. Sharma's love of Angus cattle should help him realize those goals.

Growing up on a farm and spending 11 years showing Angus have given Rischi strength. "I came home from college not really knowing my direction in life. But after being here on the farm, I know that Angus cattle will be an important part of my future."

Rischi Sharma has much to contribute to the future of the Angus breed, and he plans to learn from other peoples' experiences along the way.

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