

Angus Takes the Triple Crown

Young Angus leaders gather to learn about the agriculture industry while making lifelong connections.

by Sierra Walter, communications intern

Vibrant colors bounced across the horizon as light cascaded down on cornfields, cow pastures and an ambitious group of young Angus enthusiasts. Under the Kentucky sky, Angus breeders of all ages gathered to share stories, knowledge, and enjoy the company of like-minded cattlemen and women.

To the passing eye, this may appear to be a normal group of students. However, these individuals represent the next generation of Angus producers who will carry the breed forward for years to come.

Brimming with eagerness and excitement, 100 Angus youth gathered for the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference July 28-31 in Lexington, Ky. Juniors traveled from across the nation to convene with other Angus enthusiasts to explore the region's



agriculture industry and learn about future career opportunities.

For National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members, summer is less of a time for relaxation and more of an opportunity to invest in their future. Through long days in the cattle barn, competing at livestock shows and attending youth conferences, NJAA members capitalize on the

opportunity to further themselves as leaders and Angus breeders.

“The LEAD conference is always exciting because I get to develop friendships with people from across the country,” says NJAA member Rosalind Kidwell from Indiana. “Even though these people I meet are miles away, I know the connections I make will help me in my future.”

Thanks to the support of the Angus Foundation and Angus donors, the LEAD conference exposes juniors to new parts of the industry by hosting in various regions of the country annually. Additionally, they grew their leadership skills through workshops and networking activities.

And they're off

The weekend kicked off with a series of icebreakers, which set the tone for an eventful conference. Led by the National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) of Directors, activities challenged juniors to be bold leaders while encouraging networking among attendees. From a friendly game of tug-of-war to a meet-and-greet version of bingo, the room buzzed with the energy and excitement of aspiring leaders.

Attendees then were introduced to a variety of industries in the state, covering careers within and beyond the cattle sector. Out of the gate, juniors toured Keeneland racetrack, where they explored





LEAD provides Angus youth the opportunity to learn about different parts of the cattle industry.

equine sale rings, barns and training facilities that make up the renowned horse complex. In addition, juniors watched thoroughbreds race across the racetrack where the movie *Secretariat* was filmed.

Next on the agenda included a tour of Blue Grass Stockyards, Hallway Feeds and Boyd Beef Cattle.

Juniors entered the headquarters of Blue Grass Stockyards with anticipation to explore the historic stockyards, which date back to 1946. As the group walked through cattle pens, sale rings and classrooms, juniors quickly learned the company offers more than a place to sell cattle.

Bradon Burks, director of education for Kentucky Beef Council, explained to the group how Blue Grass works to offer a trusted venue to sell livestock while focusing on education and advocacy efforts.

Through the Youth Advocacy Research Demonstrations and Sustainability (Y.A.R.D.S.) program, Burks explained how the company works to bridge the gap between young consumers and producers.

Juniors continued to venture through the facility and into the learning complex, where Burks further described the importance of educating non-agriculturalists

about the cattle industry. Sitting in a colorful classroom decorated with interactive and informative activities, the group fully experienced the educational adventure the Y.A.R.D.S. program provides. Burks finished his tour with emphasizing the value of the NJAA and attending youth conferences.

“I am a second-generation Angus producer and grew up showing cattle in the NJAA,” Burks said. “I know the value of being with other peers who have similar interests and the importance of attending programs like the LEAD conference.”

The next lap of activities included a tour of Hallway Feeds — an equine feed mill. The group toured the warehouse, where juniors gathered around nutritionists who explained how they curate strategic feeding formulas to meet the demands of top equine athletes.

Attendees finished the day with a relaxing evening at Boyd Beef Cattle. Juniors enjoyed a tasty *Certified Angus*



Beef® (CAB) meal provided by Charlie and Paula Boyd, complete with s'mores around a bonfire.

The fun continued the next day at Tarter Farm and Ranch Equipment. CEO of Tarter Farm and Ranch Equipment, LuAnn Tarter, described the history behind the company and various careers offered within their business. As juniors explored the headquarters and manufacturing plant, the group watched Tarter develop equipment from scrap metal to the finished product.

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Following the tour, juniors piled back into the buses to visit Branch View Angus. Established in 1940, the operation holds a strong Angus heritage, spanning six generations. The tour began with hayrides exploring cornfields, old stock barns and Angus herds. As the group drove through the 600-acre ranch, James Coffey, owner of Branch View Angus, explained the history behind his family's cattle operation.

Back at headquarters, the group huddled around a cattle chute where they learned about freeze-branding and electronic identification in cattle. The night was complete with dinner and a barn dance framed by a colorful Kentucky sunset. At the end of the evening, Coffey offered a piece of advice to the juniors.

"Whether you stay in the industry or you go into something different, you will always have an agricultural background that will serve you the rest of your life," he said. "The work ethic, the responsibility and the things you learn in the NJAA will only help you in your careers. I encourage every member to leverage that agriculture upbringing to future success."

The final stretch

The LEAD conference wrapped up with speaker A'ric Jackson, who brought an exhilarating message that got juniors out of their seats and into a leadership spotlight. Jackson enlightened the group on different leadership styles and how to find individual strengths to make a difference. Juniors left the session inspired and motivated to use the skills they learned throughout the week to become tomorrow's leaders in the cattle industry.

The final day of LEAD brought bittersweet emotions among members. First time LEAD attendee Robert Geis says he found the experience as informative as it was memorable. Hailing from Barrhead, Alta., Canada, Geis traveled more than 2,000 miles to attend, and says the long trip was more than worth it.

"I learned an incredible amount about the different parts of the agriculture industry and also what it means to be a leader during the



LEAD conference," Geis says. "I am excited to bring skills I learned here back to Canada."

As attendees continued to reflect on the eventful week, retiring NJAB Chairman Alex Cozzitorto reminded the group of the value of building leadership skills.

"By attending the LEAD conference, you are investing in learning the leadership skills that are going to put you ahead in life and help you become future industry leaders," Cozzitorto said. **AJ**

