

Kickin' it in Cali

Angus youth leaders gathered to connect and learn about California agriculture.

by Katelyn Engel, Angus Communications intern

From the mountains of Yosemite to rows of almond trees, California introduced young Angus producers attending the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference to a variety of landscapes. Flying in from all corners of the United States and even Canada, nearly 150 youth gathered on the West Coast for a weekend packed with learning experiences, leadership development opportunities and various team-building activities.

Reese Anderson, Chrisman, III., says, "I expected this year's LEAD conference to be one of the most memorable because it was held in California."

For National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members, summers consist of little time for relaxation. They spend long hours working with cattle and exhibiting them at shows while also participating in contests and events to expand their skills.



Each year LEAD is hosted in a different location, allowing juniors to see new parts of the agricultural community as they travel.

If the destination for this year's conference didn't have enough appeal, the chance to see old friends and make new ones was a highlight.

"I love being able to connect with other Angus juniors across the nation," says Nico Donati, a California local, who thinks the two-hour commute from Gridley to Modesto was well worth it.

As part of her role as the National Junior Angus Association Board's (NJAB) events director, Kathryn Coleman was one of the key organizers for this year's conference. She says she was honored the conference was hosted in her home state and invited juniors like Donati

to Modesto, Calif., from Aug. 3-6.

"I poured my heart and soul into making sure it would be memorable," Coleman explains.

Words of wisdom

Despite having grown up with no connections to the agriculture industry, Fernando Sam-Sin's career now sees him in the middle of the action at rodeos. The professional photographer served as the keynote speaker for this conference, and his biggest message was for juniors to follow their dreams, as the right attitude can help them reach new heights.

The encouragement continued as Schnoor sisters Amanda, Kirbe and Sydney shared their perspective as former Angus youth.

"You want to come back because you remember the moments this industry has given to you," Amanda told juniors.

For all three girls, their past



Nearly 150 young Angus enthusiasts from across the United States and Canada attended the 2023 LEAD Conference.

involvement in the beef industry allowed them to get where they are today.

“Although we loved the show ring and the competition aspect, as adults stepping back, I think we are really able to recognize that it is so much bigger than those eight-hour days of showing,” Kirbe says. “It’s everything else that the industry and Association offer that is lifelong.”

Exploring agriculture

From one of the leading winery facilities in the industry to the sorting, washing and packing of vegetables, this year’s LEAD conference showcased a wide range of agriculture through a series of tours. Cheese tasting and orchard maintenance were just two of many live demonstrations NJAA members participated in.

At Gallo Glass Company, juniors felt the heat from the orange glow of the glass as it was molded into bottles. Excitement grew as juniors continued exploring E. & J. Gallo winery. At their next stop, a heavy wooden door opened, revealing a dark, cool wine cellar. Lined with rows of 4,000-gallon barrels, many tried to quickly calculate how many bottles of wine were aging in the cellar.



“Seeing everything from the glass bottle making to putting the wine into bottles was such a cool experience,” says Macy Taylor, Nashville, Ga.

Juniors explored the process of growing, packaging and preparing almonds for shipping at Minturn Nut Co. Being from California, Donati says he is familiar with the production of almonds but was interested to see the processing up close.

“It was really cool to visit the almond processing plant and ask them questions,” Donati says. “The processing plant was huge, and it was



Fruit, wine, dairy and almonds were just a few of the commodities LEAD conference attendees got to explore thanks to the diverse agriculture of California.

really impressive to see firsthand.”

Tours on Friday concluded at a place where Angus youth felt in their element: Vintage Angus Ranch (VAR).

At the ranch, juniors rotated between five learning labs, focusing on *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI), livestock marketing and photography, hot branding, embryo transfer (ET), and pregnancy checks. VAR staff even broke down some of their herd genetics.

“Being able to go to the different workshops was a unique opportunity for many of the kids,” Coleman says.

Continued on page 186



Kickin' it in Cali *continued from page 185*

Time in the Golden State wouldn't be complete without a visit to Yosemite National Park. Rising before the sun, the juniors loaded the buses for the long drive, but the views were worth the journey.

The paths of Yosemite were crowded with NJAA juniors in bright matching shirts with nothing but smiles on their awestruck faces.

"I really enjoyed the conference, and it was just as amazing as I expected it to be," Anderson says. "Many new friends were made, and I got to see a portion of California agriculture, which was such a fun experience."

For nearly half of the conference attendees, including Taylor, this was their first LEAD conference.

"Being my first LEAD, it was a




From tours and guest speakers to dances and games, the LEAD conference allows juniors to connect with one another beyond a shared passion for livestock.

little overwhelming, but at the same time, I felt right in place," Taylor says. "Everyone welcomed me with open arms."

Enlightened with new perspectives and a passion to be the next

generation of leaders for the cattle industry, the NJAA juniors look forward to when they will meet again.

"There were a lot of laughs and a lot of memories," Coleman says. 

A Small Note

Director of Events and Junior Activities Caitlyn Brandt shares how helping hands reached LEAD.

LEAD is so much more than a conference with educational tours and learning opportunities. Sometimes the experiences and memories made with the juniors amongst themselves end up being the most educational.

Bus 1 was leading the way, and the GPS told us to turn too soon — in a very rural California area. When Greg (our bus driver) went to pull off the road and turn around, we ended up getting hung up and the bus stuck. We sent the other two buses along on the route knowing one bus may very well need to come back and pick us up if we weren't able to get out.

One of the neighbors came and offered to help. He hooked up his Jeep® to the charter bus and no movement (imagine that!). I suggested getting everyone off the bus and asked the neighbor if I could line up the juniors in front of his shed as it was in the shade. He graciously agreed. He was a school bus driver and mechanic, so as he worked tirelessly to try and get the coach bus unstuck, another neighbor came over and offered the kids their shaded grass lawn. He was also a school bus driver, so he also went to help assess the situation.

The next-door neighbors, Alice and Harold Yates, came out to see what the commotion was. Harold is a former butcher and has gone into prisons as a preacher. Alice is retired and has made

quilts with the proceeds going to charity. Harold took the kids to his garden, which turned out to be a much larger backyard garden with around an acre of produce that he uses to supply a free-will donation food stand.

Any money made goes to pay the water bill for the garden, and the rest is donated. The juniors absolutely loved their conversation with the Yateses. Harold let the kids sample his garden — one junior had never seen okra before — and Alice shared some of her sewing projects.

As an advisor/guardian of the juniors on my bus, I made it clear that juniors weren't to go into anyone's house and to stick to the group policy, but I did feel safe as there were American flags hanging from their porches. And the "thank you" we received after sending them *Certified Angus Beef*® steaks confirmed that.

