

YOUR VIEW

by Baylee Wulfkuhle

First Place Senior Division Creative Writing Contest

Kansas Angus member's winning piece from the 2022 National Junior Angus Show.

It is July 8, 2022. You and your family have just spent the week with your Angus friends and family at the 2022 National Junior Angus Show in Kansas City, Mo. You are 20 years old, you just finished up your sophomore year at college, and this was your very last junior nationals. Today was the first day of the Owned Heifer show and your fall heifer calf won her class. Some of your friends from college who live close to the area came to watch you show, and you are in the mood to celebrate. Before you made the trip to Kansas City, you did a little research about good steakhouses in the area. You stumbled upon numerous five-star reviews for an old chophouse named “Golden Ox.” You made sure to call ahead — as many of the reviews suggested — so that you and your family and friends would not miss out.

It has been a long week of early mornings, contests, mentoring events and showing cattle. Everyone is tired and hungry, but they are still looking forward to the hearty portions of steak the Golden Ox’s website promised. After you are seated and the food comes, you start to dig in to your medium-rare filet mignon, but notice that your friend across from you is not touching their steak. From the look in their eyes, they seem to be pondering something. You ask if everything is OK with their steak, and they reply,

“Oh yes, it looks amazing. I was just trying to figure out how those cows back in the barn... turn into a ribeye like this one.”

You consider for a second how you are going to respond to this question. You could easily brush them off and tell them to stop overthinking and to just eat the steak. That would be a lot easier considering your brain is tired and you just want to eat your filet. But a little voice — that sounds a lot like your mother — pops into your head that tells you to take this opportunity to use your industry knowledge to be an advocate for agriculture. You are not sure where to start, or how deep and detailed you should be, but you finally decide to just start talking.

You explain that raising beef begins with ranchers. That it starts with the cattlemen and women across the United States who care for a herd of cows that give birth to calves once a year. You tell them that the cattle they saw in the show barn earlier likely all weighed 60 to 100 pounds (lb.) when they were born. Then over the next few months of their lives, the cattle live off of their mama’s milk and grass. You make sure to explain to your friend that the land these cattle graze is not suitable for producing crops, but the cattle can use it to produce high-quality protein like the steak in front of them. You add that the majority of beef in the United States is raised on family-

owned and operated farms and ranches.

You then explain to your friend that the calves are weaned from their mother’s milk when they are 6 to 10 months old, and they weigh anywhere from 450 to 700 lb. You tell them that this is usually the time of year on the ranch when it gets pretty noisy, and your mom pulls up a video on her phone from last spring when you weaned calves. Your friend begins to frown and says, “But they sound so sad. Don’t they miss their mamas?”

You are not sure how exactly to respond, so you take a minute. Luckily, your mom jumps in and tells your friend that, “It is kind of like their first day of kindergarten. They are a little nervous and not so sure about the other kids, but they quickly realize it is not so bad.”

Your friend smiles at that happy comparison and turns her attention back to you to continue listening. You explain that these calves continue to graze on pastures and depending on the operation, they will be finished on grass or taken to a feedyard to be finished. Your friend then asks, “Is grass-fed beef better than grain-fed?”

You tell your friend that in terms of taste, it depends on your preference. If a consumer likes a lot of flavor and tenderness in their steak, then grain-fed beef is for them. If they prefer a leaner cut with less marbling and fat,

then grass-fed and finished beef is for them.


“But what is marbling?”

You explain that marbling is simply intramuscular (in the muscle) fat and that it is what gives a good steak its flavor. Your friend smiles and says, “Well, I must be a ‘grain-fed’ person then.”

You go back to explaining what happens once the calves are finished. You tell your friend that once the cattle reach market weight of about 1,200 to 1,400 lb., they are sent to a packing plant.

You take a quick bite of your steak and begin to explain to your friend that at the processing plant, the cattle are stunned with a stun gun, and they immediately go unconscious.

This is a similar process for other kinds of livestock, and it causes the animal no pain. You explain that immediately after this, their carcasses are hung, and the other parts of the animals are separated to be made into byproducts. You tell your friend that not only do cattle become delicious steaks and hamburgers, but

their hides become shoes, bags, and sporting equipment; their fat can be used for medicine and cosmetics; and so many other products you use on a daily basis. After the carcasses are processed, they are taken to the grocery stores and restaurants where the meat will be purchased and then consumed by producers. Your friend had no idea that the steak on their plate had gone through such a long and tailored process, and you are certain they will never look at a steak the same way. 

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