

Florida Or Bust

Stretching 500 miles from north to south and 160 miles at its widest point, Florida is home to many commercial cattle herds. Despite the tropical environment, black-headed Angus cattle are making a run for the roses as the state association grows swiftly.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor, and Shauna Rose Hermel, editor Angus Beef Bulletin

The Florida Angus Association is using a variety of strategies in tandem to grow interest and participation in the Business Breed. Age isn't a determining factor. Enthusiasm for Angus programs is what Florida Junior Angus Association (FJAA) Advisor Kelley Longanecker says she is looking for in new members.

"One myth we are trying to debunk is that if you raise commercial cattle, then you can't be a member," Longanecker says of the false presumption. "There are no requirements of Angus ownership to join our association. We hope that if we get cattlemen to join and they didn't have any Angus, then they might be more inclined to get some." This strategy has helped the Florida Angus Association grow from just 27 members to a whopping 200 in only a matter of three years.

Florida cattlemen buy a lot of bulls from seedstock breeders in neighboring states. Yon Family Farms and Deere Valley regularly haul Angus cattle down to the Sunshine state.

Hook

Many Angus producers were simply born into the breed, while others got their start later in life thanks to their kids. As president of

the FJAA, Gabriela Hernandez says getting more juniors involved was actually simple.

"I think it's important to get kids interested in cattle early and show them all the ropes," Hernandez says.

"Even if they don't have cattle, there are so many contests out there that they can do."

As Florida juniors begin to realize the endless possibilities of Angus, the dedication and passion is growing

along with the numbers.

"We have seen a lot more kids involved and participating in the contests this year," she adds.

With a contest for every interest and skill level, the FJAA provides opportunities for juniors to try each of them at home.

"We have a show in the spring and fall where we have some of those contests," says the Florida Angus Queen Morgan Blommel. "Our spring show determines who gets to compete in some of the contests at the NJAS."

The last time the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) was hosted in

Louisville, Ky., Florida only had five juniors present. In 2019, 24 juniors and 26 head of Angus cattle traveled to the Bluegrass State for the NJAS.

Giving Florida juniors just a small taste of what the NJAS is all about piques their interest. What gets them on the road to attend are the memories brought home and sprinkled on social media by the older members that attend each year.

Line

"I think when younger kids see the older juniors going to shows and doing the contests but also getting involved in other things like the Florida Cattlemen's Association, that prompts them to get out of their comfort zone too," Longanecker says. "Everybody is looking for

a place to fit in and get involved. We always talk about showing cattle, but Angus is so much more than that."

Longanecker grew up with Angus. That gives her the experience and know-how to advise Florida juniors to make the most of their experience with the breed. She works hard to make their junior experience memorable and a subsequent



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transition to membership as an adult a natural progression.

“There’s the scholarship and contest opportunities, but then the conferences that Angus offers allows juniors to network and get out there even more,” Blommel says. “Going to LEAD, Raising the Bar and STAR conference, I have made friends from all over the country. One of my best friends lives in Kentucky, and most kids can’t say that.”

Florida has never had a member serve on the National Junior Angus Board of Directors (NJAB). Longanecker is hoping to change that someday soon.

Blommel ran for the board this year, but fell short. It’s no doubt a leg-up in the board race to have a large junior association. The FJAA is making headway on both goals.

“We have had workshops in the past for both the adults and juniors in our association,” Longanecker says. “That made our fall field day pretty unique.”

The event brought the two groups together in an effort to let the other see what they were missing out on.

“We wanted to get the adults out there to support the kids, but also give them something they could take home as well,” she says.

Several educational clinics — Neogen, an embryologist and David Gazda, American Angus Association regional manager — kept the adult members captivated while the juniors hosted their meetings.

“I think putting those two things together made the fall show a great success,” Longanecker says. “A lot more of the adults stayed for the show to support the kids.”

Ownership is key for the FJAA as it continues to build up membership.

“Letting the juniors really take control of our association has helped



This year Florida was represented by 24 members showing 26 head of Angus cattle at the National Junior Angus Show in Louisville, Ky.

get more kids involved I think,” Hernandez says. “They feel like they have the opportunity to voice their opinion on things.”

And sinker

Simply put, getting the word out about the Florida Angus Association has made the most difference for membership growth.

An extensive directory is allowing the association to branch out to the far corners of the state.

“The directory has been a good resource for our adults and kids,” Longanecker says. “There are a lot of sponsors that contribute to it. We started it just last year. Members can pay for advertising if they want, but every member is listed with their contact information.”

The juniors host various fundraisers throughout the year for their activities, but funding for the adult sector is a bit more limited. The directory served as a conduit for raising funds through advertising as



well as connecting the members.

Florida Angus officers find themselves promoting the association across the state at various cattle conferences. It’s this word-of-mouth advertising that makes the difference in the long run.

No matter the avenue, Florida cattlemen finding their way to the Florida Angus Association will be pleased with the passion and dedication of its growing membership. **AJ**