

A Standout

One young man's Angus cattle business has helped him rise to the top.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

"I always thought having cattle would be so cool," Tanner Mickey says of his childhood.

Tanner's family was already in the farming business, but about six years ago, it was clear to Jon and Carla Mickey their son's passion was for cattle. Tanner was only 12 years old, but he was already involved in 4-H, and he wanted to find a way to add cattle to the family's farming enterprise in Taylorville, Ill.

"I was eager when we had the opportunity to rent a pasture nearby. I was young, but excited," he says.

Careful consideration

Mickey, along with his parents, dived into researching the type of cattle they would purchase.

"We looked at a lot of options of breeds and considered a commercial herd," Mickey says. "Everything kept bringing us back to Angus and all

the benefits the [American] Angus Association has. There were so many opportunities to give back to the junior members through scholarships and contests.

"We also liked how easy-going Angus cattle can be," he continues. "We knew that was something we wanted to focus on. We talked to other people that had a lot of good things to say about their Angus cattle. We thought the Angus breed was the way to go."

After shopping around, the Mickey family purchased a nice set of bred heifers from Hoover Angus Farm, Ellston, Iowa, in 2015. Tanner Mickey's cattle business, one that would lead him to many opportunities, had officially begun.

Mickey set to work studying the business and genetics, and working to make his herd even better. He forged a strong business relationship

with Landi Livingston (the current manager and Hoover great-granddaughter) from Hoover Angus.

"I first got to know his family when they came out and purchased cattle from us," Livingston says. "Tanner has always been genuinely interested in the cattle, and had a really good eye for phenotype in the cattle he has selected."

Though the cattle operation was supposed to be a hobby, it quickly turned into his full-time job, Mickey says, as he worked to learn all he could about the industry.

He has grown the herd to 30-40 Angus cows currently, some fall-calvers and some spring. He says he focuses on genomics, using numbers to help make the best mating decisions possible.

"My main goal is selling the best bulls possible to commercial cattlemen," he says. "I am also

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making replacement heifers to bring back into my herd.”

The Mickeys do show, even though it's not a huge focus for them.

“My brother, Drew, and I only show in the summertime, but we try to attend Angus junior nationals and Eastern regionals,” Mickey says. “We also usually go to Central Illinois Angus Preview Show, but don't get too carried away with showing.”

He did participate in the Phenotype and Genotype Show (PGS) during the 2020 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). The PGS is an additional competition providing an educational opportunity to learn about expected progeny differences (EPDs) as part of seedstock selection. This type of show interests Mickey, especially as he isn't necessarily focusing on showing as much as improving his genetics to sell bulls.

He says focusing on serving commercial cattlemen's needs has paid off in terms of sales.

“We've done a very good job selling our bulls for a fair price,” Mickey says. “I feel like that's one of our greatest accomplishments.”

Working to improve

Mickey admits it took a while to establish a good marketing program.

“There have been some ups and downs and learning new things,” he says, “but I feel like we are starting to get the hang of things. I think we've grown and learned from our

mistakes. I've learned how to make better decisions, and that's affected our cattle herd.”

Part of making better decisions has



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been Mickey's willingness to reach out and ask questions.

“Tanner is the type of person that really likes to learn, and so he's not afraid to ask questions and learn more,” Livingston says. “I really like that about him. He's trying to improve and be the best he can be, and that takes asking a lot of questions.”

As Mickey's education progressed, so did his commitment to FFA and livestock judging. His cattle operation became an integral part of his Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) for FFA. He was

chosen as the Illinois Star Farmer for his production of beef, sheep and swine, as well as corn, soybeans and wheat.

“Being named the Illinois Star Farmer is one of my greatest accomplishments,” Mickey says, “and my Angus seedstock operation played a major role in my recordbook, and was a huge part of my success.”

Another place his beef cattle experience has helped him shine is through livestock judging. Mickey was part of the champion livestock judging team at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver in 2019.

That national title earned fame for himself along with the rest of his judging team back in Illinois, where they were invited to the state capitol to meet with a senator and the Illinois director of agriculture.

“It was an awesome experience,” Mickey says. “We were able to take a tour and see how

everything works on a daily basis. We got to do a press release with the senator and director, which was a really neat experience. I got an inside look at what it is like to have a job like that and what some of their daily tasks are. It allowed me to better understand how issues get handled and how they directly affect the agriculture industry.”

That summer the judging team also had the opportunity to do an overseas agriculture tour. His group spent two weeks touring Scotland, Ireland and London, England.

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“That was an awesome experience, and one I will never forget,” Mickey says. “We got to see how agriculture works there and how they do things differently, as well as similarly, to us. We also got to see many different landmarks and try lots of new food.”

“It can be tough, but the cattle have shown me anything is possible if you put your mind to it and work hard to achieve your goals.” — Tanner Mickey

Looking ahead

His Angus business will have to take a backseat now as Mickey is attending Lake Land College, Mattoon, Ill., this fall. He will be competing on the livestock judging team and be involved in the ag transfer program, so he can continue his education at a four-year university afterward.

“Starting our herd from scratch

was a challenge that taught me to work hard to be successful,” Mickey says. “I feel like we’ve accomplished a lot in the last six years and look

forward to the future even though I will have to turn over some of the day-to-day tasks.”

Livingston says Mickey is a rarity

in his generation.

“I really foresee Tanner taking leadership roles in state or national organizations like NCBA (National Cattlemen’s Beef Association) or National Corn Growers Association, because he has that type of potential,” she explains. “He is outgoing and has the right type of personality. He has good morals and

values. I think of his generation, he is a true leader and stands above his peers so much.”

Mickey says although he will be at college, he plans to make it home as much as possible to help with the cattle. He wouldn’t be where he is today without discovering his passion for Angus cattle.

“I feel like I’ve stayed motivated in accomplishing my goals with the cattle,” he says. “Even though we started with nothing, we’ve continued to be the best we can be. That reminds me I can do anything. ... It can be tough, but the cattle have shown me anything is possible if you put your mind to it and work hard to achieve your goals.” **A**

Editor’s note: Sara Gugelmeyer is a freelance writer from Lakin, Kan.

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