

Touring the Beef Industry

Foundation sponsors Angus leader to attend Young Cattlemen's Conference.

by Garrett Wilkerson & Shauna Rose Hermel

Lydia Yon, Ridge Spring, S.C., took advantage of the opportunity offered by the American Angus Association to attend last summer's Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC). The Angus Foundation sponsored Yon on the eight-day, nationwide tour that included stops at beef industry hubs starting in Colorado and ending in Washington, D.C.

Yon and her husband, Kevin, manage 375 Angus cows and 250 commercial cows on their 1,400-acre ranch. Their three children are active junior Angus members, and Yon is currently an advisor for the South Carolina Junior Angus Association. She also is an active member of the South Carolina Angus Association. She has participated in several National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) events.

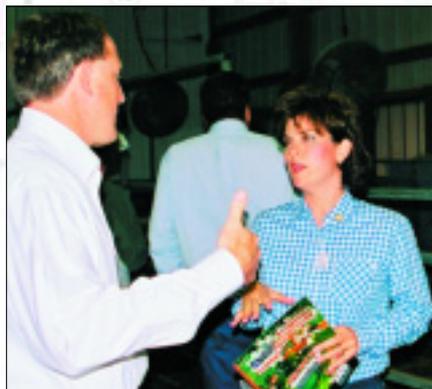
"It was truly an honor to represent Angus breeders across the nation on this trip," Yon says. "My husband and I have been in the Angus business full time for 14 years, and it was great to be selected to represent young Angus breeders from across the country."

"Lydia was a great candidate for this tour," says John Crouch, executive vice president of the American Angus Association. "She and her husband, Kevin, have certainly been successful in the beef cattle business. Much of their success is a direct result of their hard work, their attention to detail, and their use of new and innovative approaches to beef cattle production."

Recognizing some people might be hesitant to apply because of the title of the trip, Yon says not to let age keep you from applying. "YCC was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," she says. "The only advantage that youth will give you is the ability to travel hard for seven-plus days with very little sleep while your brain is working overtime!"

YCC is a program hosted by the NCBA to develop leadership qualities in young cattlemen and expose them to all aspects of the beef industry. The annual tour is designed to help leaders understand all areas of the beef business.

As the Angus Foundation seeks applicants to represent the Angus breed on the 2004 YCC (see "Association Highlights," page 36), the *Angus Journal* asked Yon to share some highlights of the 2003 event.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NCBA

Angus-sponsored participant Lydia Yon (shown at right above) shares her afterthoughts on the value of attending the Young Cattlemen's Conference.

AJ: How many participants went on the YCC tour? What was the group like?

Yon: There were 42 participants with a wide variety of experiences in the beef industry. There were seedstock producers, stocker operators, feedyard operators, cow-calf producers, a market analyst from Cattle-Fax, a Tyson Fresh Meats sales staff member, a beef buyer from Wendy's restaurant chain, a representative of Southeast AgNet Radio Network and several NCBA staff members. The participants came from all over the United States, from family-owned operations like ours to large corporate feedyards like Cactus Feeders and ContiBeef LLC.



► The YCC tour group visited many segments of the beef industry including a stop at Grant County Feeders near Ulysses, Kan.

Many people don't consider going on an extended trip like this because they say they can't afford to be away from home that long. Was it worth it?

It is a long time to be away from home, and you have to have the support of the people at home to take off on this trip, but it is certainly worth it. My husband participated in this trip about 10 years ago, representing our state cattlemen's association, so he encouraged me to participate as he knew how beneficial the trip is. I think all the participants on our trip would agree it was time well spent. It was especially interesting for my family during my absence, because not only did they have to take care of my responsibilities on the farm, but our three children (12-, 11- and 9-year-olds) also had to take care of all the household duties as well. They did a great job and were all very supportive of my participation.

What topics did you cover during your various stops?

The trip began in Denver, Colo., at NCBA headquarters where we received information from all the areas of NCBA, ranging from beef quality assurance (BQA), to issues management, to research and the beef checkoff. During a Cattle-Fax seminar while in Denver, we learned about the beef market outlook and various factors that affect it. (I do wish I could hear the seminar again, three months later, after the record-breaking price changes we have recently seen.) Then it was on to ConAgra Better Beef LLC, a pasture-to-plate beef alliance. Swift & Co. gave us presentations on food safety and an overview of their operation.

After a long bus ride to Ulysses, Kan., we visited Grant County Feeders, which has a capacity of 112,000 head. From Kansas, we flew to Iowa, where we visited Tyson Fresh Meats and took a day-long tour of their facilities, including the tannery, fabrication floor and sales coolers. We happened to be in the plant during a *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) run, so it was especially enjoyable as an Angus breeder to see all the CAB boxes rolling down the line.

We headed to Chicago, Ill., from there and visited the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), where we covered the CME's role in the cattle industry, heard perspectives from a CME trader, and learned about the relationship between futures and cash markets. We had the opportunity to go down on the trading floor during active trading, which was very interesting.

While in Chicago we also visited The Bruss Co., a purveyor serving the domestic and international foodservice industry. From Chicago, it was on to Washington, D.C. We attended briefings on public policy from NCBA staff, and we also attended several White House briefings. We received a lot of information about country-of-origin labeling (also referred to as COL or COOL) and the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) case in Canada, which happened only a week or so before our trip. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was also host to us for an afternoon seminar.

After a day of intense education, we were ready for an evening of fellowship at Whitestone Farms near Aldie, Va. Whitestone's Mark Duffell is a past YCC participant. We concluded the following day with individual congressional visits with each of our state legislators. We also attended the Beef Caucus Picnic with more than 600 congressmen and Capitol Hill staffers.

It didn't take long to understand why our NCBA host who coordinated the trip (Marvin Kokes) introduced past participants as "having spent a year with us one week." After all the tour stops and speakers packed in, plus the travel and fellowship time, there was little time available for sleep.

What would you consider the biggest eye-opener on the trip?

Being from the Southeast, I was the furthest removed from the packing industry of any of the other participants, so I really enjoyed the tour of the Tyson Fresh Meats facility. It is truly amazing the speed at which carcasses are processed and how specialized each job is in the plant. I would have to say that was the highlight for me, as it was my first trip inside a plant of that magnitude. I think it depended on the individual's prior experience — for those on their first visit to (Washington) D.C., the time spent there was a highlight. It's so easy while at home to get wrapped up in what we are doing in our own operations. Seeing all segments in-depth, including the political process, kept us all thinking during the entire trip.



►YCC participants attended the Beef Caucus Picnic with more than 600 congressmen and Capitol Hill staffers.

Did the diversity of the group add to your learning experience?

Definitely. During the travel from one stop to the next and during evening outings, we had a good bit of time to visit with other participants. There is a lot to be learned about the vastness of our industry, and talking to folks who check their cattle by airplane, spend their day handling the finances of a huge feedlot, or buy products for Wendy's is an education in itself for a southeastern Angus breeder. Honestly, we probably learned as much visiting with each other as we did on the tour stops and seminars.

Did the group come to you for your seedstock experience?

Yes, and there were several other Angus breeders on the trip as well. Some were representing their state cattlemen's associations. Performance records, expected progeny differences (EPDs), reproductive management, etc., were Greek to many of the participants on the trip who were involved in other segments. In addition to those types of questions, there was a great deal of interest in the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) program and its success. I really learned a great deal from the other participants, and I hope I contributed to their experiences as well.

Do you think this experience has made you a better spokeswoman for the beef industry or the Angus breed?

Absolutely. We had a session on spokesperson training at NCBA headquarters, and just the in-depth exposure to the industry as a whole, and taking a whole week to process all the information without everyday distractions, broadened my horizons a great deal. I think that will make me better as a spokesperson for the entire industry as much as any formal training. I have always thought that being an advocate for our industry is important, and even more so now.



►YCC participants had the opportunity to visit with their congressmen while in Washington, D.C.

What was the most useful thing you learned on the 2003 YCC tour?

I can't point to one particular thing; however, throughout the entire trip, almost every speaker spoke about food safety and consumer satisfaction. It was interesting that all segments play a part in those issues, and that, while our various segments are diverse, satisfied consumers eating high-quality beef is, or should be, everyone's ultimate goal. It won't matter how excellent our Angus genetics are if people aren't buying beef for dinner!

If a state association or group wanted you to tell them about your experience, would you be a speaker?

While I am not a polished speaker by any means, the NCBA staff provided us with a great PowerPoint presentation that I would be glad to share with anyone.

The American Angus Association is accepting applications for being the Association's 2004 YCC nominee. Would you encourage members to apply?

If you want the experience of a lifetime, you should take the time to fill out the application and give it a shot. It is an honor to represent Angus breeders across the country on the trip, and I am so grateful for the opportunity I had. Not only will you gain a great deal of education and develop new friendships, you will also have a great time. I sincerely appreciate NCBA hosting the event and the sponsors of the trip — John Deere, ContiBeef and Tyson — for their sponsorships.

