



BARBARA LABARBARA/PHOTOS

Brandon Bakken (left) has apprenticed with Brian Halverson for the past 10 years on Halverson's Minnesota farm.

A Helping Hand

Brian and Joanne Halverson give a young man hope, encouragement and an opportunity to try his hand at livestock farming.

Brandon Bakken is a 19-year-old 4-H veteran. He has shown lambs, champion steers, Angus cattle and won his share of showmanship trophies. He's not much different than most young livestock producers except that he lives in town. His parents divorced when he was nine and his father was killed in an automobile accident a short time later.

When tragedy struck the Bakken family, Brian and Joanne Halverson stepped in to help make Brandon's world a better place.

"Brandon has no extended family," says Joanne. "His mother was an only child. He has an older sister, his mother and grandmother, but no male influence in his life. We offered to become his 4-H parents."

BY BARBARA LABARBARA

Without his adopted 4-H parents, Brandon probably would have never known the thrill of watching a cow give birth, halter breaking a calf, or leading his first Angus steer to a championship.

The Halversons were already acquainted with Brandon's family. His mother had shown Shorthorns and been a Shorthorn Lassie in her youth. His father had been the farm management instructor at a local school. When the Halversons offered to become Brandon's 4-H parents, his mother, Paula, knew how much work it would be and was grateful for their help. As district manager for Avon, she travels a lot. Without the Halversons, Brandon could not have participated in 4-H activities.

The four Halverson children — Mike, Matt, Pamela and Jane all had 4-H projects and were active in junior Angus activities when Brandon became part of their family. The boys helped Brandon start his show career. Brian helped with halter breaking, leading and feeding, but left grooming to the boys.

Brandon exhibited sheep for nine years. In 1990 he showed his first steer, Sherman, who was named Clay County 4-H grand champion Angus steer and Minnesota State grand champion.

From the time the Halversons became his 4-H parents, Brandon kept his animals at their farm. The Halversons fed the animals and Brandon worked on the farm in the summer months. In exchange, he kept whatever the animals brought at the livestock auction. In 1993 he netted more than \$2,000 with a lamb and the Minnesota State Fair reserve champion steer. He showed his first Angus female last year and now has two from which he hopes to build a herd.

Matt Halverson has been an especially good role model



Brandon Bakken proudly displays championship trophies and plaques he had earned for exhibiting livestock.

for Brandon. He is married and lives in Barnesville, close to where Brandon lives with his mother. They ride to the farm together every day.

The Halverson Farm is located 15 miles east of Fargo, N.D., near Baker, Minn. The area is better known as the Red River Valley. Brian and Joanne's roots run deep in this valley. They live in the house where he was born and where they raised their chil-

dren. Their children were in the same 4-H clubs and competed at the same fairs they did.

The biggest challenge with their 2,000-acre farming operation, Brian admits, is not having enough time to get everything done. Corn and oats raised on the farm are fed to the cattle. Irrigation of their fertile black soil is not necessary because of the annual rainfall. The Halversons have two large temperature and

humidity controlled cellars where they store their seed potatoes before they are sold.

In 1973, when their oldest daughter was nine, they started buying registered Angus heifers for 4H projects. Those projects have grown to 170 registered Angus females.

"If I had it to do over, I would go to a dispersion and buy females instead of picking up some here and there," says Brian. "With today's expected progeny differences (EPDs) it's easier to buy the right kind of cattle."

The Halversons have used EPDs for several years and worked with the University of Minnesota and their county agent before EPDs were available. They artificially inseminate (AI) the majority of their cows and use clean-up bulls. Mike does the AI breeding, but will have help as soon as Brandon completes AI school.

Culling is based on disposition, milking ability and udder condition. Disposition is important because the majority of their calving is done in close quarters in a calving barn which holds 20 cows at a time. The calving season falls in January and February, when temperatures in Minnesota can drop dramatically. They avoid spring calving because of damp conditions.

Matt and Brandon recall the first calf in 1994 was born when it was 40 below. She lost the tip of her ears, but survived. "It can be 20 below zero and we won't lose any ears or tails," adds Brian. "We don't have scouring problems. It's too cold."

The Halversons had a production sale at the farm on Oct. 28, 1987. But Brian discovered it was the wrong time of year for a cattle sale. They now sell bulls at private treaty with many of them going to commercial breeders as yearlings. They have a good market for 4-H steers and heifers, and participate in consignment sales.

"The cattle keep it fun for us," says Joanne. "We aren't in the right area to be raising cattle but we love them."

With encouragement from Vern Kerchberger and Leo Baker, the Halversons consigned to their first Minnesota Angus Association sale in 1975. They had champion sale bull and have consigned to that sale every year since. Tom Burke began to manage the sale in 1980 and moved it to Rochester. Consignors were rewarded with better prices as the sale was upgraded.

For the past 14 years, Burke has been going to Minnesota in January to select cattle for the sale. Brian helps with the selection in the northern part of the state and John Reed helps in the southern part.

Brian believes that anybody who is starting in the Angus

business needs to be associated with a local or state Angus association.

"In order to keep your state association strong you have to sacrifice a few things, like time," says Brian. "Associations are where the youth get their start. The biggest problem with associations is once people get where they want to be in the Angus business, they leave the association."

Brian and Joanne have been active in the Minnesota Angus Association for 20 years. He served as president in 1980, 1981 and 1982. Joanne was president of the auxiliary in 1980. Brian is president of the association again this year and Joanne is leading the auxiliary. They are members of the Red River Valley Angus Association, as well.

Besides being active in Angus activities, Brian is an

FFA and vocational education advisor. He serves on the state potato seed board, the county weed control board, and has been a member of the Clay County Fair board for 20 years, serving as president for three years. Both he and Joanne have been 4-H leaders for more than 20 years. Another young person they helped was the county agent's son, Duane Bernhardson. The proceeds of his 4H projects helped put him through college.

In their spare time, Brian bowls and Joanne has a small craft business. They have four grandchildren who also help keep them busy.

The Halversons have received recognition for their dedication and service to agriculture. In 1991 they earned the North Dakota State University Outstanding Agricul-

turist Award and Valley Farmer and Homemaker Award for Clay County.

As Brandon has grown, so have his responsibilities at the Halverson Farm. He now participates in all aspects of the family farming operation, which includes small grains, corn, potatoes and beef. This year the Halversons depended on Brandon to take their entries to the annual state fair auction by himself. It was five work-filled days.

Brandon Bakken is the kind of young man that would have turned out OK even if Halversons hadn't taken him under their wing.

Still, Brian and Joanne take satisfaction in saying, "It has been good to watch Brandon grow and mature into a fine young man."

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