

Hands-on Experience

A passion for cattle helped Bradley Warren win a national FFA award.

Story & photos by **Stephanie Veldman**

Those closest to Bradley Warren, Lebanon, Ky., describe him as a self-starter who always goes after, and usually succeeds at, projects for which he has a passion. His mother, Helen, and his father, Mark, say that Bradley's biggest passion is for his cattle, and that his successes with his cattle have been achieved on his own through hard work and determination.

"He is a very hard worker. From the time he was small, he was up and out of the house on weekends because he just loved working on the farm. He just lives it. He is totally into the farm life and into the cattle," Helen says.

Bradley is the 2002 winner of the National FFA Proficiency Award in Beef Production — Placement. The award recognizes student achievements in agribusiness gained through working for an operation other than your own. There were four national finalists competing for the award. Each finalist received a plaque and \$250. The national winner received an additional \$250 at the 2002 FFA convention.

James Fisher, a judge for the proficiency award, says, "As you judge the contest, you look at the scope and size of the project, what they started with and what they have moved the project to, and how they personally have developed through the program or through the involvement in their Supervised Agricultural Experience or SAE." Fisher is director of activities and junior activities for the American Angus Association.

Fisher says that picking a winner out of the four finalists was a difficult decision, and the competition was close. They chose Bradley because of his passion for working with cattle.



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► Silverton Hill Farms, near Springfield, Ky., has a herd of 283 commercial Angus cows. Bradley completed his SAE by working on the farm, which is managed by his father, Mark.

"I think that as judges, as a group, we felt that he really had a passion for what he was doing," Fisher says. "He was using that as a means to better educate himself in a field that he was looking at going into long term."

The contest

On the FFA Web site, www.ffa.org, the SAE program is described as "the actual hands-on application of concepts and principles learned in the agricultural education

classroom." Participants are supervised by their ag education teachers, parents and employers. The SAE program is designed cooperatively by students and supervisors. It can be tailored toward the student's desires — a business of his or her own, or placement in a job that uses his or her ag-related skills.

Bradley, a sophomore at Western Kentucky University (WKU) majoring in agribusiness, completed his SAE by working at Silverton Hill Farms near Springfield, Ky.

In his award application, Bradley shared a set of goals he had established.

"My first goal was to learn as much as I could about beef cattle. Working for Mr. (Tommy) Hamilton and alongside my father has enabled me to learn many skills, such as proper nutrition, proper administration of medications, monitoring cows at calving time and artificially breeding the herd.

"My second goal is to become a farm manager after graduating from college," Bradley wrote in his award application. "My

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► Bradley's family describes him as a self-starter who usually succeeds at the projects for which he has a passion. The Warren family includes (from left) Jillian, Helen, Bradley, Mark, Lee holding Jake, and Kalan Hood.

third goal has come about from my first goal. After working for my father and handling the cattle on Mr. Hamilton's farm, I decided I would like to own my own herd of registered Angus cattle."

Farm life

The Warrens moved to the farm in 1994 when Mark took the job as farm manager for Silverton Hill Farms, owned by Hamilton. Mark manages a herd of 283 commercial Angus cows and about 300 head of feeder calves. The cows are divided into fall- and spring-calving herds, with 180 head calving in the spring and 103 head calving in the fall. Bradley says they keep all their own replacement heifers — approximately 25-40 head per year.

Silverton Hill has approximately 1,500 acres, of which 400 acres are harvested for grain, and 500 acres contain Thoroughbred horses and are hayed. The feedlot can hold a maximum of 350 head at one time.

"We quit feeding feeder cattle in the field because it was too time-consuming. Instead we made enough room in the feedlot," Bradley says. "It helped a lot because they are in a confined area, which has helped make them more gentle and easier to handle.

"All we do is bring them to 800 pounds and then sell them. We used to finish them out, but found it was too expensive to feed them — too expensive to buy them and feed them out."

Mark says that Bradley generally takes care of all of the hay processing on the farm, and that his responsibilities and abilities to make decisions are growing every year. "He had a great deal of the responsibility of the bull purchasing this year," Mark says. "Ever since he has gone to college he has really studied genetics. Of course we have always discussed replacement heifers, and he knows what replacement heifers I have." He adds that he and Bradley looked at seven bulls together, and Mark had one picked out. Bradley

studied the other six — the one he chose was the one they bought.

Presently, Bradley owns a small herd of 16 head of Angus cattle and is raising and selling bulls. His parents say that Bradley started his Angus herd with a heifer he bought with his savings. "He had worked on the farm before that and had made some money," Helen says. "The second year he showed cattle, he withdrew his entire savings account of \$700 and bought his first heifer."

"We let him pretty much make his own decisions. It is his money — he worked for it; he can spend it himself," Mark says.

Future goals

Bradley has been involved with FFA, the Kentucky Junior Angus Association (KJAA) and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). He has held several positions in his FFA chapter, including reporter and president. He was also a director for the KJAA, and was on the planning committee for the 2003 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), which was in Louisville, Ky., in July. Bradley says that his future goals include coming back to Silverton Hill to continue to work with his father as an assistant farm manager, if it is possible.

"If that isn't an option, I would like to manage a large beef cattle operation and increase the size of my herd," Bradley says.

Both of his parents say they see him working in the beef industry.

"I do look for him to be a farm manager of some sort," Mark says. "I believe he will manage first, when he gets out of school, but I don't think he will do that very long before he owns his own."

Helen adds, "He is very intelligent, particularly when he really has an interest in things. I have always said that he can do anything that he wants to do. If the interest is there, I think he can absolutely do it. I think it is just finding his place in the world in the profession that he really loves."

