

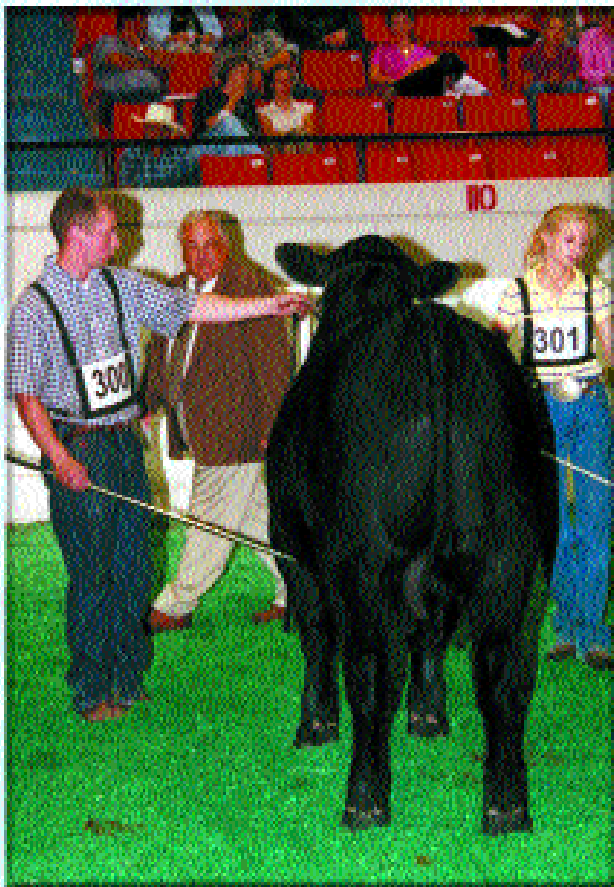
More Than A Heifer Show

Juniors exhibit bulls at the NJAS to market their programs.

Story & photos by Corinne Blender



► Nebraska junior Angus member Emily Pohlman, Norfolk, waits in the make-ready area before entering the ring. She has been showing bulls on the national level for four years. She says it is important to gain experience showing before a junior member takes on the responsibility of showing a bull.



► Craig Moffitt, Colfax, Iowa, says showing bulls at the NJAS is a great way to help market his family's program.

Known for her maternal traits, the Angus female has long been queen of the ring at junior events, especially at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). In fact, the NJAS got its start in 1969 as the National Junior Angus Heifer Show. But a prince has since entered the scene.

The National Junior Angus Heifer Show outgrew its name as many more contests and classes of cattle were added to the show throughout the years. The Angus bull show, added in 1982, has become a popular contest for many juniors. It's a different level of competition, says Emily Pohlman, Norfolk, Neb., junior member and four-time bull exhibitor at the NJAS.

"I like it because there are not as many classes as there are with the heifers," Pohlman says of the bull

division. "It's always interesting to see who's out there showing the bulls because a lot of people show heifers, but not as many people show bulls."

Showing bulls does take a different approach, says Craig Moffitt, Colfax, Iowa, junior member. He has been showing bulls for eight years, including three NJAS appearances.

"I first started showing bulls as a cow-calf pair," Moffitt says. "Then I showed that bull calf at the Iowa State Fair and sold him through the Iowa Beef Expo."

These two seasoned bull exhibitors share their experience to help encourage other junior members to exhibit bulls.

Traveling

Pohlman says traveling with bulls in the show string does have its challenges.

"A lot of times it's just trying to get them so much feed. They eat a lot more than my heifers do," she points out. "That's probably the biggest challenge."

She has also learned that bulls can have a different attitude than heifers.

"Sometimes bulls can be pickier when you go to a show. They are finicky with their feed. So we try to find exactly what they like to eat and try to get them to eat all of their feed," Pohlman says. "Once you get to a new setting, they always like to act up a little bit more. They are harder to handle than a heifer because they are so much bigger."

Showing

A yearling bull can outweigh a yearling heifer by more than 300 pounds (lb.).

"There is definitely a difference when we first clip before we bring them to the show. You don't want to make them feminine-looking like a heifer," Pohlman says.

Moffitt says showing a bull requires extra care in management, too.

"It takes more time when you are showing a bull," he says. "They have to be exercised properly, and you can't just put them in with heifers at any time. They have to be maintained more on their own."

Bulls can be more aggressive, and that's a situation for which Pohlman advises juniors to be prepared.

"They are bulls, and you don't want them to bother another calf or get into a fight with another bull. You always have to be very cautious when you are leading one to make sure they don't try to get into trouble," she adds.

Knowing how to handle the bull if he gets a little ornery is a big reason both Pohlman and Moffitt recommend that juniors gain experience handling a bull before taking it into the showing ring.

"You definitely don't want a real small kid trying to show. They should have experience showing — I would say they need to be showing for a couple of years — before they try and show a bull so they are more confident with themselves and what they can do with him," Pohlman says.

Selecting a show prospect

Pohlman selects her bulls from her family's herd of 80-100 cows. Her family has an established bull clientele in Nebraska, and she says that adds an extra challenge to selecting her show bulls.

"Usually it is pretty hard for me to pick the bulls because we have a regular base of customers who like to get bulls every year. It's hard to try to snag a bull away from my dad before he sells him," Pohlman says. "This year I was lucky enough that my bull was one of the last bulls that we could have sold, but he turned out to be one of the better ones."

Moffitt selects his bulls from his 25-30 bull calves.

"I look for an animal that's the most sound, performs above the others and that's phenotypically correct," Moffitt says. "The bloodlines are extremely important to carry on the genetics through the herd."

The home setup

Care at home is another aspect that both juniors consider an important part of showing bulls.

"Since they are bigger, you need a good place to be able to tie them. Everything needs to be pretty safe and sturdy, because if they want to pull back on a panel or something that you want to tie to, it definitely won't hold them," Pohlman says.

It's also important that bulls are handled similarly every day, adhering to a normal routine. "They must be in the same pen



► Moffitt says it is important to select a bull that is structurally sound and a high performer.

every day when they come into the barn. They also have to be by themselves at night and in their own runs," Moffitt says. "You want to try to keep things the same because if you don't, then they get to pawing everything and making a big mess."

Pohlman recommends juniors take an extra precaution by double-tying bulls with neckties if they are to be tied in the same area as heifers, especially if no one will be around the cattle while they are tied.

Bulls also need to be fed separately from heifers.

"You want to give the bulls a little higher protein ration than you would a heifer throughout the time you are showing them," Moffitt says.

Bulls need to be developed at a more

rapid pace than heifers, so they'll be ready for their first breeding season.

Marketing

Both Moffitt and Pohlman have seen their programs benefit from displaying their bulls in shows on the national level.

"As a family operation, if you want to increase your marketing for your family and help yourself farther down the road, then showing bulls in the bred-and-owned show is one of the fastest ways to do that," Moffitt says. "It increases people's awareness for your bloodlines and shows the kind of new things that you are trying."

Show spectators do come to sort through the barns and to look at the cattle. Pohlman says people have approached her after watching her bull in the ring.

"We have had, even just this last year with the bull I am showing right now, a lot of people interested because they have seen him out in the arena," she says.

While showing bulls may not be for everyone, both juniors agree that having experience prior to the show is essential if it is something you'd like to try.

Moffitt says, "You need to work with them the most at home if you are at a young age, so the animal is used to you and neither one of you are overwhelmed when you come to the show."



► Showing bulls can lead to extra challenges. It's important to keep bulls separate from the rest of the show string when traveling.