



## Boots-on-the-ground Training

Indiana native Jessica Janssen stepped out of her comfort zone and into the saddle this summer, diving headfirst into the world of wide-open spaces and a 600-head herd of registered Angus cattle. Selected as the inaugural intern for the Angus Foundation's Talon Youth Education Learning Program, she was paired with Maher Angus Ranch, located on the North and South Dakota border.

Janssen grew up near Otterbein, Ind., on a small, purebred cattle operation. Throughout her lifetime, she has been actively involved in the Indiana Beef Cattle Association and the Indiana Junior Angus Association. Janssen will graduate from Purdue University in spring 2018 with a degree in animal science.

She is a go-getter with a strong love of

**Fulfilling Cam Cooper's legacy, Talon internship provides hands-on, real-world education for Indiana junior Jessica Janssen.**

*Story & photos by  
Mayzie Purviance, intern*



the cattle industry and the dream of one day becoming a beef nutritionist. So naturally, when her email inbox lit up with a notice regarding the Talon internship, she couldn't help but apply. Once selected for the internship, Janssen was paired with Maher Angus Ranch.

### **Back at the ranch**

Owned and operated by the Maher family, Maher Angus Ranch is home to eight of the 67 residents of Morristown, S.D. The Maher family has been in the area for more than 100 years, passing down the love of farm and ranch life through each generation. Casey Maher, a third-generation rancher and the ranch manager, served as Janssen's mentor for her internship.

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► **Above:** Casey Maher (left) and intern Jessica Janssen discuss pasture management. All ranch aspects are included in the Talon Youth Education Learning Program experience.

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► The Mahers, including (from left) Casey, Gina, “adopted daughter” Jessica Janssen, Sidney, Dan and Sterling, get ready to gather cattle on an early South Dakota morning.



► After the cattle are gathered, the mother cows and calves are sorted by Gina Maher and Janssen using low-stress methods.

Janssen’s first visit to the ranch was during spring branding.

“She was kind of baptized by fire,” Maher says with a chuckle.

Janssen had never taken part in a ranch branding. However, she jumped right in with the Mahers and caught on quickly. It was a unique experience to western ranching that she might not have been exposed to otherwise.

The excitement didn’t stop there. Over the summer, Janssen became a student of the cattle industry by diving into hands-on experiences such as artificial insemination (AI), embryo transfer (ET), heat detection, ultrasounding, checking cattle and water tanks, and pasture management. Janssen says she received a richer education at the Maher Angus Ranch than she could get by sitting behind a desk.

“I think we gave her some huge perspective,” says Maher. “I think she’ll go back to college and her classes will make more sense to her. When she gets out in the workforce and the ag world, she’ll just be that much more marketable to the industry.”

### The transition

Janssen notes that Maher is a great teacher and is always looking to educate her on something new. She also touches on the value of her newfound knowledge in the wide variety of the cattle business.

Janssen says despite the difficulties, like being 18 hours away from home in a new environment with new people, she went into her internship with



► One of Janssen’s daily chores is to feed two different pastures of bulls. It’s all hands on deck at the Maher Angus Ranch in times of drought, so having that extra set of hands to assist with daily tasks is highly valued.



► Some of the many skills Janssen brought with her to Morristown were her showmanship abilities. Janssen has shown cattle all her life, joking that she ate, lived and breathed show calves when she was younger. She was able to assist the Mahers’ in tying up their 4-H calves and helping the family with brushing, washing, feeding, and leading.

► The Maher Angus Ranch uses horses and dogs to drive cattle, a new concept for Janssen to experience. “My favorite memory from this intern experience was being able to ride out on horseback to herd and work cattle alongside the family members, as well as the dogs.”



an open mind and excitement about learning from her new experiences. This can-do attitude helped her become more involved and take away more from her educational experience.

The transition from Janssen’s prior cattle experience in Indiana to Maher Angus Ranch in South Dakota was major. From the way the Mahers use cow dogs to gather their herd to the lay of the land, Janssen was in for many new experiences.

Janssen acknowledged that the largest difference she recognized was drought. She said she had never seen a drought so up close and personal, and she hadn’t realized before this summer that it was such an issue. One of her routine chores was to help the family check the 60 water tanks spread throughout the ranch, which opened her eyes to many different aspects of such a dry climate.

“Being out here in South Dakota, it’s a lot

different than what I’m used to,” Janssen says with a grin. “There is a lot more open range and hills, and a lot more cattle than what I’ve grown up with. I like to see that; I like to see that there’s more cattle than people out here.”

### Part of the family

Aside from work and geographically related differences, Janssen was also immersed in the culture of life in Morristown and the Maher family. Her main purpose as an intern was to learn about the cattle industry on a registered Angus ranch, but she claims the cherry on top of her summer was the Maher family’s hospitality and kindness.

“The family made the transition easy,” says Janssen. “They really opened up their arms, their house and their family to me.”

Janssen resided in the Maher home as a

“temporary member of the family” for the summer so she could get the full experience of life on the ranch. She accompanied the Mahers to church, weddings, family outings, street dances and even attended the Maher family reunion (along with more than 200 other Mahers). Janssen used her prior showing experience to help the Maher children with their 4-H projects daily.

If you’re lucky enough to be a Talon internship host, Maher advises future host families to treat them like one of their own.

“You just kind of adopt her as your daughter for three months,” he says.

### A living legacy

Janssen and the members of the Maher family agreed that the Talon Youth Education Learning Program internship was beneficial for all parties. Janssen was able

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## Apply for Talon Youth Education Learning Program internship

If you’re looking for a unique summer internship experience, the Angus Foundation can help. Applications for potential interns are still available on the Angus Foundation website for the Talon Youth Education Learning Program internship.

“The Talon internship program is truly one of a kind in the Angus industry,” says Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president. “It gives one lucky student the opportunity to experience ranch management firsthand — an invaluable experience. Angus breeders get to work with an up-and-coming leader in the industry. It’s a win-win scenario for both.”

Host Angus breeders get the opportunity to teach the intern about different areas of the Angus industry, from cattle showing and veterinary tasks to fence maintenance and irrigation and more. They also can expose the intern to educational events and activities off the farm, such as seminars, field days, etc. The Talon intern host Angus breeder applications were due Sept. 15.

College sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students and recent college graduates who are not older than 25 who have

majoring in an agriculture-related field are eligible to apply. Applicants must be in good standing with either the American Angus Association or the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). Angus youth can apply for the Talon internship program at [www.angusfoundation.org](http://www.angusfoundation.org) and submit an application by Dec. 1 to the Events and Education Department.

The Talon Youth Education Learning Program internship is the legacy of Camron “Cam” Cooper of Talon Ranch. Cooper set up the Angus/Talon Youth Education Learning Program Endowment Fund in 2009 to be a holistic educational experience for students. The internship program pairs motivated Angus youth with working registered Angus breeders/ranches to provide youth valuable education and work experience for a summer. The internship program is open to college sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students and recent college graduates under age 25 who are majoring in an agricultural field of study.

For more information on the Angus Foundation, visit [www.angusfoundation.org](http://www.angusfoundation.org).

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to gain an educational experience she would only be able to receive outside of the classroom, while the Mahers got an extra set of hands for the summer.

“For someone who is wanting to participate in this internship, I would encourage them to jump out of their comfort zone,” says Janssen. “Be open to learning something new and totally different than what they’re used to. It’s just an overall great experience.”

The Talon Internship Program is a great resource and tool provided by the Angus Foundation. It allows college students to learn about ranch life in a hands-on, educational way and sets them up for future success. None of this would have been possible if it weren’t for one person: Cam Cooper.

In 2009 Cooper set up the Angus/Talon Youth Education Learning Program Endowment Fund in hopes that young members of the Angus community would have the opportunity to try something new

► Janssen feeds one last pen of cows, takes a deep breath and smiles after a long, hard day of work on the Maher Angus Ranch. For more information about the Talon Internship Program watch the Sept. 4 episode of *The Angus Report*: <https://youtu.be/r0s-mKtpHWM>.



while receiving a valuable education.

“It’s been a pleasure and an honor to carry out a vision or plan for a lady like Cam Cooper. Through the Angus Foundation and through the Talon Internship Program, they lined us up with an individual like Jessica Janssen. We truly feel like our operation can take an individual like Jessica and give her that hands-on experience,” says Maher.

Cam Cooper cared about the future of the agricultural industry. She wanted to make sure the industry she loved would be taken care of down the road, which is why she created her legacy: The Angus/Talon Youth Education Learning Program Endowment Fund. Her legacy lives on in the Angus breed. It lives on in the Angus Foundation. It lives on in Jessica Janssen, the Maher family and every participant of the Talon Internship Program in years to come.

**AJ**