



► Abby Rayl says her junior Angus experience has helped her in her dream to play softball and to serve her country at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. She holds true to her roots and believes those values help her live up to a cadet requirement that says, "A cadet will not lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate those who do."

A True

Angus youth uses lessons learned through beef industry experience to become a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

Story & photos by **Corinne Patterson**

Many Angus juniors find themselves dedicating several days, weeks, months and even years to the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and to their respective state Angus associations. In return, they gain a lifetime of memories, many new friends and much more.

Angus connections allow these youth to learn about the beef industry. Participation offers juniors opportunity to learn more about themselves and, more importantly, what they want to do with their lives.

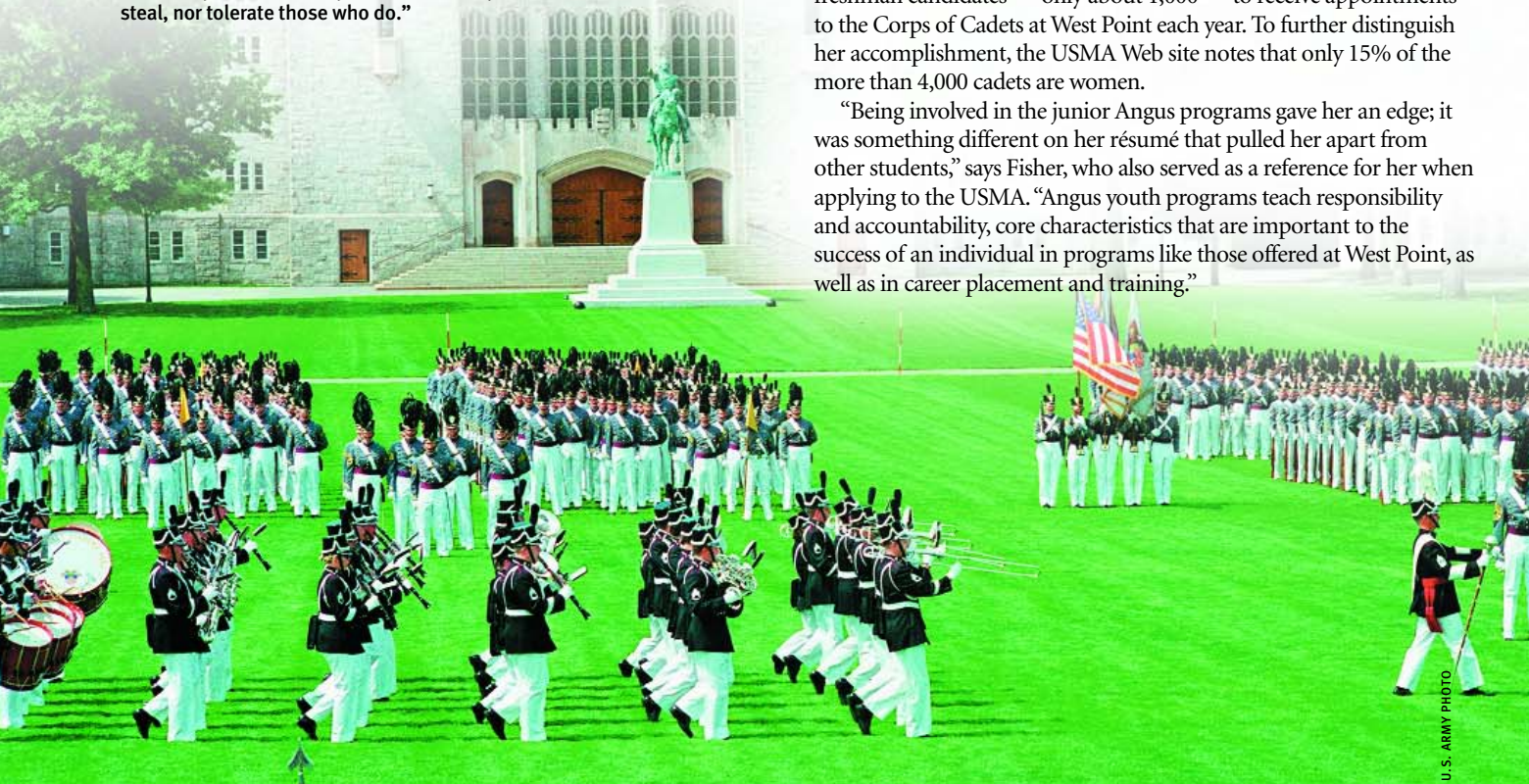
While Abby Rayl, Hutchinson, Kan., is not currently seeking a career in the beef industry, her Angus involvement has allowed her to stand apart and to become a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, N.Y.

Getting an edge

"Being involved in junior Angus programs and activities can lead to success in many areas of life. Abby was active in the junior Angus programs on state and national levels," says James Fisher, American Angus Association director of activities and junior activities. "She took the skills she learned in the junior programs and applied them to other areas of her life."

From more than 10,000 applicants, Rayl was selected as one of a few freshman candidates — only about 1,000 — to receive appointments to the Corps of Cadets at West Point each year. To further distinguish her accomplishment, the USMA Web site notes that only 15% of the more than 4,000 cadets are women.

"Being involved in the junior Angus programs gave her an edge; it was something different on her résumé that pulled her apart from other students," says Fisher, who also served as a reference for her when applying to the USMA. "Angus youth programs teach responsibility and accountability, core characteristics that are important to the success of an individual in programs like those offered at West Point, as well as in career placement and training."



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Standout

Rayl attributes her successful application to the USMA to time spent in leadership roles and through involvement in the Angus breed. But just as she attributes her Angus success to working with a great group of Kansas Junior Angus Association (KJAA) members, it's her Midwest upbringing that she says offers a great advantage.

Her livestock background probably prepared her a little better than many cadets, says Abby's father, Brad Rayl, of her experience raising and showing Angus cattle. "She knows what it is like to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning. She knows what it is like to work all day long and have to get up and do it the next morning. She has an advantage over someone who doesn't have that responsibility."

Abby says her Angus background isn't the norm at the USMA, which many call West Point after the community where the academy is located. Many times she says she's been questioned about her farm background and called Dorothy from the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Gaining entry

Admission to the academy is open to all young men and women, but is extremely competitive, the USMA Web site says. To apply, candidates must receive a nomination from a member of Congress or from the Department of the Army.

When reviewing applicants, there are key characteristics the academy desires, Abby says. Candidates must excel in academics, physical ability and leadership potential. A strong emphasis is placed on moral and ethical development. Each of these qualities, she adds, has been developed and nurtured through her Angus activities. She acquired many skills through working with Angus cattle and preparing for contests supported by the NJAA.

Knowledge

Academics are something that Abby excels in outside of Angus. By balancing Angus events, softball, speech and many other activities in high school, she has built a strong work ethic conducive to being a top-notch scholar.

"Lori and I have always wanted to get our children involved in things that are outside of what the normal child gets to experience, whether it be athletics, speaking or participating in musicals," Brad says.

Power

Abby has never faced gender discrimination when showing Angus cattle, which is good preparation for West Point, she says, where men outnumber the women. There's no discrimination at the academy; women are expected to pass the same physical requirements as men.

"You kind of turn into 'one of the guys' showing cattle; there's no less expectation of you," Abby recalls. "When I was first starting to work with cattle I know I had a big fear because I had been kicked when I was really young. One of the Army values is to face fear and danger and adversity and conquer it. It's not easy to hold on to a 1,400-pound bull at 14 years of age. I think it says a lot about being able to overcome fears and doing something different than most people."

Abby also excels in softball, the sport she was recruited to play at the USMA. Like any other university, she must balance her collegiate sport involvement with rigorous academic requirements.

Commitment

As an Angus youth, Abby had many responsibilities. She cared for her show calves and also juggled her desire to compete in many contests at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

"The United States Military Academy considers it more valuable for you to achieve distinction in a specific activity, rather than to participate in a number of activities without any evidence of leadership achievement," says the USMA Web site.

Angus activities have allowed Abby to be more than just a name during roll call. She took an active role holding state offices and acting as a true leader. By doing so she learned a lot about herself and her talents.

"I think being involved in other things, such as holding a state office, helped me with leadership. I know I am capable of being a good leader and holding a leadership role," she says, adding that makes it easier for her to participate in classes at West Point. "Just being able to talk to people and to stand up and not be embarrassed to give a speech or to present a problem, just having the confidence is something I gained from my Angus activities."

Brad says that he wanted his children, Abby and her brother, Parker, to grow up with the values that the Angus family shares.

"The junior Angus association, in my opinion, is one of the best youth organizations that I have ever dealt with, particularly on the national level. People associated with the cattle industry know how to work, they are self-reliant, they are independent — and that's the type of people we want our kids to associate with," Brad says. "You can be more than just a cattle kid. It teaches you speaking skills. It teaches you salesmanship. It teaches you recordkeeping. Plus, you have contacts all over the United States."

While not every Angus junior has aspirations of being a cadet at West Point, youth should take pride in knowing that the training provided through the NJAA makes for strong leaders. The months and years of dedication to the NJAA can make a difference.

Abby advises, "You need to stay active in this because, no matter where you go, it's going to help you."



► Abby says she misses Angus cattle now that she is hundreds of miles away from her hometown of Hutchinson, Kan. While she's not able to leave the academy very often, she spent a few weeks home this summer and attended the Kansas Junior Angus Preview show to catch up with old friends.