

# Advice & Action

Experienced individuals share this advice with others seeking a foothold in agriculture.

by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

**W**hat advice do those working in the beef industry offer to others looking to pursue a career in agriculture?

Phil Bass, the corporate meat scientist for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand is an energetic educator who has a passion for teaching students, producers, consumers, retailers, foodservice distributors and chefs about the science and fabrication of beef to ultimately improve the culinary experience and eating satisfaction of the final product.

He offers this advice for young people embarking on their careers: “It’s the old cliché of ‘love what you do!’ It’s not hard for most folks who grow up in and around agriculture, but even those coming from more urban backgrounds should not find that a limitation. Just know that the animal agriculture world is extremely rewarding, but also takes a lot of hard work and passion. Folks who work in the beef community do not hold regular business hours, but that’s because what we do isn’t a job — it’s a way of life, and we don’t mind what appears to be long work days.”

Bass continues, “The legacy of animal agriculture will continue because of the committed and passionate people who are part of it. I know and work with folks from a multitude of backgrounds, some from farms, some from cities, but all have a passion for growing and working with food. It’s an exciting

community to be a part of... It’s not just the planting seeds and feeding cattle — you can be involved in the distribution of goods, animal and plant health,

governmental regulatory administration, meat and food processing, food safety, mechanics, and marketing of products; the list goes on and on. Whatever it is, have an unbridled passion for what you do, and you’ll be great at it!”

## Production perspective

Nebraskans Kenny and Misty Stauffer were high-school sweethearts. He had a passion for ranching instilled in him by his grandfather.

“I wanted to stay in agriculture,” he says, “but there wasn’t an opportunity for me to run the family ranch.”

Then opportunity knocked. At just 19 years old, while breaking horses for a Colorado landowner who operated a ranch in Nebraska, Kenny was offered the opportunity to work at the Hoot Owl Ranch. At the time it had fewer than 50 head of cattle and about 400 acres.

Kenny recounts, “Misty and I took the job, and I convinced the owner that the cattle industry was the future for Hoot Owl Ranch. He trusted me at 19 years old, and with my big dreams and desires to be a large rancher, we worked together and now have 600 commercial cows, 150 registered cows and 16,000 acres.”

Today, Kenny and Misty own 25% of the livestock and manage the ranch, which includes a small backgrounding lot and feedlot. Over the past decade,

Kenny has been particularly passionate about recordkeeping, genetics and data, and he is using artificial insemination (AI) to advance the herd.



▶ “Whatever it is, have an unbridled passion for what you do, and you’ll be great at it!” says Certified Angus Beef LLC Corporate Meat Scientist Phil Bass.

“I love trying to create the best bull or heifer,” he says.

Through the years, the couple has also become actively involved within the beef industry, from the Nebraska LEAD program to co-hosting the Cattlemen’s Ball at the ranch and participating in an overseas trade mission.

“My passion for the industry has really grown and evolved along with the ranch,” Kenny says. “I wasn’t searching for a career; I was searching for a way of life, and I wanted to raise my family in the same community I grew up in. God just blessed my family with this ‘career.’”

The Stauffers credit their successes to their willingness to embrace change and innovation. They say, “If you are not comfortable with change, you will get left behind.”

To young people looking to start out in ranching, the Stauffers suggest, “Sometimes as young people we may ask for advice, but we aren’t always willing to actually listen. It’s easy to think you know what you’re doing if you come from a ranching background, but as fast as the industry is changing, we have to be willing to not only listen to advice, but to

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make changes that may come along with that advice.”

They add, “Never give up on your dreams, but be smart about jumping into the business. We would recommend taking it slow and not jumping in with both feet.”

The couple says the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) was instrumental in helping them get started and learning to be good recordkeepers.

### **Advocacy also important**

Misty adds that most recently she and Kenny have become passionate about consumers and how they view what beef producers do.

“Our goal aside from selling exceptional

bulls and heifers is to feed the world. Kenny and I want beef consumers to know that we are working every day to provide the best quality beef no matter whose plate it ends up on. It is so important for us to take the initiative to have a voice for the beef industry and inform people the truth about what they’re eating and where it comes from,” she shares.

Likewise, Peter Taylor of Kirby, Mont., notes, “Beef promotion and advocacy is a big goal for me. I feel our industry has a long road ahead to undo the bad publicity ranchers and beef have received.”

Taylor was raised on a Montana ranch, but obtained his education on the East Coast — earning his high school diploma from a

boarding school in New Hampshire, attending a liberal arts college in Maine, and trying his hand in the office world for a couple years. After those experiences, he returned 14 years ago to the rugged hills and big sky of south-central Montana to carry the torch — along with his older brother — as the third generation on the family ranch that was started by his grandfather.

He credits the insight and perspective he gained from living in more diverse areas for fueling his continued passion for ag advocacy. Taylor and his wife, Amanda, have been active in the Montana Farm Bureau during the past decade, which he credits with providing professional development workshops, public speaking and social media

skills, and ag policy knowledge.

“It’s provided an avenue to develop skills you don’t develop on the ranch,” Taylor says.

Through the Montana Farm Bureau Federation, he was also involved in establishing an annual “Hoofin’ It For Hunger” race at the Fort Keogh USDA Research Station at Miles City, Mont. Proceeds raised from the event benefit the Montana Food Bank Network, which serves almost all of the food pantries in Montana.



► Events such as the Montana Farm Bureau’s “Hoofin’ It For Hunger” race offer opportunities for ag advocacy, providing avenues to talk to people about beef nutrition and health, says Peter Taylor of Kirby, Mont.

Through participation in running events like this, he says, “It gives avenues to talk to people, especially about beef nutrition and health.” He adds, “People want to talk to producers and are often surprised at the facts we have.”

Looking to the future of ag advocacy, Taylor encourages people within the beef industry to look to new allies. He notes that more partners are needed to amplify and share accurate information about the industry.

Regarding his return to production agriculture,

Taylor also has some words of advice. He notes there is a “big difference between being raised on a ranch and being a rancher.” Since returning to the ranch, he admits he has learned the virtues of patience and communication with family members. He notes that developing and sharing goals for the ranch among his parents and brother has its challenges, but he has also learned that knowing the business and amassing the knowledge of the older generation takes time.

Looking toward the future, and with the fourth generation in mind, Taylor says they will strive to find ways to grow and be efficient, while also making time for advocacy and promotion.



**Editor’s Note:** Kindra Gordon is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.