



Anchored on Angus

Beef Leaders Institute brought together producers from across the country to learn about the Angus industry.

Story & photos by **Bridget Beran**, editorial intern

To get an in-depth look into each sector of the beef industry from pasture to plate could take a person years of their lives. For Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) participants, it only took five jam-packed days.

Established in 2007 by the Angus Foundation, BLI was created to enhance the knowledge and leadership skills of Angus producers aged 25 to 45 years. Twenty American Angus Association members from 16 states made up this year's BLI class. On June 20-24, participants gained insight into Association work, reproductive work, feedlots, genetic testing, packing plants and the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

"Every BLI participant plays an interesting role, coming from different backgrounds and different geographical locations," Hannah Connealy-Raudsepp, Boston, Mass., says. "It is good for us to come together and have dialogue about what's important for us at this moment, where we see the future of the beef industry going and how Angus can play a role in continuing to be the leader."

BLI kicked off at the Association office in Saint Joseph, Mo., where CEO Allen Moczygamba welcomed participants and explained the basics of the inner workings of the Association. Along with staff presentations, Debbie Lyons-Blythe, *Kids, Cows and Grass* blogger, spoke to the BLI class about the importance of authentic advocacy and building positive relationships.

Past the farm gate

After wrapping up their time at the Association office with talks from staff members and Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc. representatives, BLI participants headed north to Nebraska. For the second day of BLI, attendees started things off with a visit to GeneSeek laboratories in Lincoln, Neb. GeneSeek gave participants a tour of its facilities and gave them an update on the latest improvements coming to their labs.

"Traveling along on this BLI tour, I never thought I would be inside and learn how DNA sequencing happens," Bryce Borrer, Tehama Angus Ranch, Gerber, Calif., says. "It was a great experience to see everything up close and personal."

After their time in the labs, participants then headed to J's Steakhouse in Fremont, Neb., for a workshop about cattle markets with Paul Dykstra, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) beef cattle specialist.

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► "It is impressive to see how closely related all aspects of the industry are," Eric Still (left), Still Angus Farm, Lead Hill, Ark., says. "Every segment of the industry works to produce a safe, wholesome product always with a satisfied consumer in mind."

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“Ever-changing cattle markets create added stress on cow-calf operations, and it is becoming crucial to add value through quality genetics and feed programs in order for producers to get the largest bang for their buck,” Dykstra says.

Dykstra challenged BLI participants to put their math skills to the test before lunch as they tried to calculate the return on investment for different scenarios.

Next on the list was a visit to Weborg Feeding Co. LLC, Pender, Neb. Attendees were given an in-depth view of the sprawling facility, from pens of cattle to the feed-production area. This portion of the trip gave producers important insight into the world of the commercial and feedlot producer.

“Feedlots are very important for American agriculture because we can utilize state-of-the-art technology to make cattle more efficient and also use a minimal amount of resources to provide sustainability for beef,” Nicole Tommell, MMT Cattle, Fonda, N.Y., says.

Along with her husband, Nicole feeds out their cattle in an indoor feedlot facility and markets their cattle on the grid.

Learning more about the consumer side of things was also an important part of why Sally Yon, a former Miss American Angus and National Junior Angus Board member, Ridge Spring, S.C., chose to attend BLI.

“Growing up in the Southeast, there are no large feedlots around. There are few



► “Understanding how much goes into [beef production] from the producer level all the way to the end product, and what is being done at CAB that pushes back to the cow-calf guy puts it all into perspective,” George Richburg Jr., manager of the Auburn University Beef Teaching Unit, says of the beef business in a workshop presented by Debbie Lyons-Blythe at Association headquarters.

packing plants, and so an opportunity like this really makes me appreciate both ends of the spectrum,” Yon says. “Touring the feedlot and seeing the packing plant was such an eye-opening experience. I knew the details, I knew what was involved, but seeing it in person is something I will always remember.”

Moving back to the seedstock production side of the industry, the BLI class then headed to Trans Ova Genetics. A tour of the facilities

was in order, along with many questions about the *in vitro* fertilization and cloning processes that take place within Trans Ova labs.

“We have more ahead of us than behind us,” David Faber, Trans Ova Genetics president, says about the future of genetic development, especially in the meat animal sector.



► BLI attendees got a behind-the-scenes look at testing at GeneSeek.



► BLI participants check out the meat counter at Buehler’s Fresh Foods. “What I’ve learned here at BLI [is] there is nothing I can’t apply to either side of the business,” Reid Roberts, Paradise Valley Land and Cattle, Sparta, Mo., says. “The story, relationships and sacrifice across the board are universal. I’m in a niche market, and knowledge is power.” Roberts also brought 19 years of restaurant experience to the table at BLI.



► BLI participants were able to inspect all aspects of Weborg Feeding Co. LLC.

The third day of BLI was off to a quick start with a visit to the Tyson Foods packing plant in Dakota City, Neb. Participants toured the facility and had a question-and-answer session with staff about the demands of packing plants, the ways producers can ease the stresses on the packing side and how the plant runs so efficiently.

“Being able to see the Tyson packing plant was very unique,” Derik Arntzen, Arntzen

Angus Ranch, Hilger, Mont., says. “It gave me a look at part of the industry I have never seen before, and it is something I don’t think a lot of people get to experience. It is beyond anything I could have imagined.”

The Dakota City plant is the largest of its kind in the world.

“BLI has given us insight that very few ranchers have had the opportunity to see,” Joe Lowe II, Oak Hollow Angus, Smiths

Grove, Ky., says. “The packing plant was real interesting; that’s an opportunity where most wouldn’t be able to go through the world’s largest packing plant.”

Focus on the plate

The process of BLI was stalled in the Omaha airport with weather delays keeping them from leaving for Cleveland, Ohio. After a late flight to Chicago and a quick turn around the next morning, things were back on track as participants reached Sysco Cleveland Inc. A major base for CAB, Sysco Cleveland is an excellent partner for getting CAB on shelves and in restaurants. Danny Flynn, protein brand manager and CAB specialist, is incredibly passionate about the brand and ensuring its success.

“I go out and ask restaurant managers if they have had one bad eating experience, one plate sent back, one problem since they started buying CAB,” Flynn says. “I’ve asked this probably 2,000 or 3,000 times and the answer is always no.”

A short trip brought BLI participants to the home base of CAB: Wooster, Ohio. Attendees were welcomed to CAB’s Education and Culinary Center by CAB staff. From the history of the brand to the current advertising plans, participants got a full view of the marketing side of the brand before moving into the kitchen and meat lab.

Phil Bass, meat scientist and “meat ninja,”

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► “You should never be done learning,” Justin Uhrig, Mount Rushmore Angus, Hermosa, S.D., says. “It is a challenge; and especially in our industry, I think you need to stay educated on the future line of the beef operation to ensure your family’s legacy continues for another generation or advances even further.”



► “BLI really helps bridge the gap between the cow-calf operation and the retail side,” Ty Walter, Walter Angus, Hudson, Colo., says. “It has been a really good experience, and it is exciting to see our hard work pay off, especially for those who focus on carcass quality.”

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gave BLI participants a rundown on meat grading and showed them new ways to break down certain pieces of the carcass to maximize the value of a CAB-certified animal. He explained how they bring in butchers and chefs to teach them new ways of utilizing otherwise under-appreciated pieces of the carcass.

Once these new cuts are identified and developed, the next step is figuring out recipes and methods to prepare them. That's where CAB chefs like Ashley Pado come into play. Pado has recently been featured on the Food Network show *Chopped*, along with other Food Network competition shows. She gave producers a side-by-side comparison challenge between grass-finished beef, grain-finished beef and CAB. With the help of meat scientist Diana Clark, they explained the differences in these meats.

Benefits of BLI

BLI participants wrapped up their experience by visiting Buehler's Fresh Foods, a local grocery chain that is a big supporter of the CAB brand. While there was a lot to be learned from participating in BLI, many attendees say the greatest lesson came from networking with their fellow producers and learning how things are done in different parts of the country.

"The opportunity to meet my fellow BLI classmates has been eye-opening to learn how they [manage] cattle compared to how I do back home in Pennsylvania," Kyle Grim, Beaver Creek Angus, Thomasville, Pa., says.

"It has been a great opportunity to learn more about the industry that I didn't know was there," Jeff Herian, Herian Ranch, Alliance, Neb., says. "We've learned so much

that it is nearly overwhelming. Nowhere else are you going to get this much information in such a short period of time."

BLI plays an important role in bringing producers together from around the country, as well as enriching their knowledge about the beef industry. This is something Kevin Murnin, Marshall Cattle Co., Burlington, Colo., says is so important in adapting for the future.

"In terms of education, you can never quit learning," Murnin says. "It doesn't matter what stage of life you are at. This beef industry is an ever-changing industry, and there is always something to learn, there is always something you can improve on, there is always something your operation can do better."

For each of the 20 participants, the BLI experience helped to expand their horizons, their networks and their knowledge.

"It was important to me to get a better understanding of not only the industry as a whole, but also to better understand the in-depth process that each sector of the industry goes through to produce a great product," Ben Tokach, Tokach Angus Ranch, Saint Anthony, N.D., says. "Being able to see what happens at the Association, at meat packers, at GeneSeek, at CAB, BLI helped give me more knowledge in a few days than most people will get in a year."

Applications for the 2017 class will be available later this fall and will be due March 1. For more information, visit the Association's Event Registration page at www.angus.org/EventRegistration/default.aspx. For more information about BLI, contact Chelsey Smith at 816-383-5149 or csmith@angus.org. 



► BLI participants visit the Certified Angus Beef LLC Education & Culinary Center.