

# New Perspectives

## Beef Leaders Institute gives Angus members insight into all aspects of beef production.

Story & photos by **Morgan Marley**, communications intern

Boots hit the ground at the American Angus Association as nearly 20 Angus producers entered the building June 19. Looking to further their knowledge and education in the cattle world, participants of the 10th annual Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) arrived at the Association with much anticipation for a week of learning and networking with professionals in the cattle industry.

The Angus Foundation-sponsored event was hosted June 19-23 and started at the Angus Association's headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo. For five days, 17 Angus members and Association staff traveled throughout the Midwest exploring less-familiar aspects of beef production for a pasture-to-plate experience.

For most of the producers in attendance, this was their first time visiting the Association office. The opportunity to learn about the daily operations of the Association gave them insight to the dedication Angus employees have to their membership of nearly 25,000 people.

"I had always wondered where our fees and money go to, but it is a great investment," said Martin Allison with Allison Farms in Waverly, Tenn. "People truly don't understand the effort and time the Association puts into its members. It really opened my eyes. If anyone ever asks why we have to spend so much money when we register our Angus cows, I can tell them it is well-spent."

The mission behind BLI is to provide producers between the ages of 25 and 45 the opportunity to network with their peers in the Angus breed, while learning more about the Association and sectors of the beef business after cattle leave the ranch. Participants were selected through an application process and represent leaders within the Angus breed.

"BLI is designed to provide Angus producers the opportunity to see all sectors of the beef industry after cattle leave their farms," Caitlyn Brandt, event coordinator for the American Angus Association,

said. "By having the chance to network with other producers, feeders, packers, processors, retailers and other industry experts in the areas of genetics, reproduction and marketing, participants go home with knowledge and information that provides better insight into making production decisions on their own operations."

The group toured various beef sector operations throughout the Midwest and rounded out their trip in Wooster, Ohio, at the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand headquarters. Throughout the week, participants visited Neogen GeneSeek Operations in Lincoln, Neb.; Feller & Co. Cattle Feeders in Wisner, Neb.; Trans Ova in Sioux Center, Iowa; the Greater Omaha Packing Co. Inc. processing facility in Omaha, Neb.; a Sysco distribution center in Cleveland, Ohio; and Giant Eagle retail Market District Supermarket in Cleveland, Ohio.

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**—Jocelyn Washam**

Participants were able to experience all sectors of the beef industry, interact with production experts and develop a larger vision to not only improve their operations back home, but to improve the entire industry. What makes BLI a unique experience is the opportunity it provides producers to see firsthand how their decisions on their farm correlate to the end product at the grocery store.

"BLI truly allowed us, as participants, to have a pasture-to-plate experience," said Jocelyn Washam from Wentworth, Mo. "Not only were we able to network and make lifelong friends, but we were able to make ourselves better advocates of the Angus breed

so we can go out and educate the consumer about Angus cattle and the livestock industry in the ever-changing and growing world we live in."

BLI participants were guaranteed to not go to bed hungry. Perhaps the highlight of the trip was the mouthwatering meals highlighting various cuts of beef throughout the week.

At CAB headquarters, the participants were able to put their grilling skills to the test while learning tips from a professional, CAB's Chef Ashley Breneman. The last morning of the trip before 10 a.m., the group had sampled grass-fed, USDA Select, CAB-certified and dry-aged steaks. Sampling each drives home the value behind beef being branded with CAB to provide the consumer with a better eating experience.

"Once you put these different fed cattle on a plate, the difference is black and white," said Clay Richardson with Richardson Cattle Co., Carlsbad, N.M. "What probably stood out to me the most were the CAB specifications beef must meet to qualify for the brand. The 10 specifications hold great value to consumers who are buying steak, either at the grocery store or restaurant."

Being able to see and taste the difference in each of the steaks gave the cattle producers a new respect for their business and dedication to go home and work toward producing value-added genetics in their own herds.

"I think going through off-the-farm experiences puts perspective into a young producer's mind, or anybody who's out in the field," said Jeremy Leister from Stillwater, Okla. "We've got to think of everybody else who has to handle beef or works in the packing plant. We've got to make it easier as an industry and help each other out and work as a team. BLI makes you think about all of the steps in the process."

Agreeing to leave a full-time job is a big commitment for anyone, regardless of his or her field of work. The time commitment is often enough to deter producers from applying to BLI in the first place.

Once Friday afternoon came around and

this year's BLI participants were preparing to say their goodbyes, there was an agreement that the entire experience was worth the week away from their families.

"It's a big commitment, but I think the networking opportunity and the fact of seeing the whole industry in a short amount of time with industry professionals is well worth it," said Jason Jagels with Jagels Land and Cattle in Davenport, Neb. "It's an opportunity that I think everybody in the Angus business should strongly consider applying for in the future."

For more information on how to participate in the leadership event, visit [www.angus.org](http://www.angus.org). Applications for the 2018 class will be available online starting next winter. Watch the "Association Highlights" column for announcements.



▶ BLI participant Brad Johnson checks out CAB at the meat counter at the Market District Supermarket in Cleveland, Ohio.



▶ At the CAB Culinary Center, BLI participants met with a meat scientist to learn about the 10 CAB specifications.



▶ BLI participants were sure to never go hungry during the five-day trip. A variety of CAB cuts were enjoyed throughout the week.



▶ BLI participants came together from across the country for five days of networking with fellow Angus breeders and industry professionals. Their first day was spent at the American Angus Association learning about how Angus employees serve the organization's nearly 25,000 members.

PHOTO BY JD ROSMAN