

# Showin' Off

2011 BLACK HILLS  
RD Stock Show & Rodeo



► Left: Breezy and Jon Millar, Amanda Kammerer and Matt Kammerer pose with the heifer donated by the Millars, fitted and shown by the Kammerer girls. The Kammerers went on to purchase the heifer and are anxious to show her in futurity shows.

## Local Angus producers take the “pick of the ranch” to town for the Black Hills Stock Show.

Story by **Carrie Stadheim**; photos contributed by story subjects

The Black Hills Stock Show and Rodeo provides a much-needed winter break for area livestock producers and townspeople alike. It's an economic boost to the Rapid City, S.D., area, as well as to hundreds of vendors who spend 10 days peddling their wares to shoppers from several states.

Hosted every winter, kicking off the last weekend of January and continuing for 10 days, the event is also a useful tool for seedstock producers looking to advertise and promote their product, specifically cattle. And it's a fun and exciting place for young cattle producers to take in the bright lights of

the city and learn how to reap the rewards of long hours of hard work.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to make the connection. It is a stock show, after all. And while sometimes the primary purpose of the event — the display of good livestock — can take a back seat to the glitz and glamour of the rodeos, the banquets, and the endless shopping; when the day is done, the real purpose of the event is to promote and uphold the cattle industry. Without an economically viable cattle industry, the Black Hills Stock Show and Rodeo wouldn't have an audience or a clientele.

The busiest day of cattle shows is “Angus Day,” conducted every year on Monday to kick off a week full of showing and selling 10 breeds of cattle. Some of the show participants are hard-core showmen and women, who travel the circuit. But many of the bulls and heifers on display come to Rapid City in their “work clothes” from local ranches.

### Entering the ring

Jon and Breezy Millar of Millar Angus hosted their 10th annual production sale at Philip Livestock, Philip, S.D., in February of 2011. But they had never “shown” one of their home-raised registered Angus in the showing.

“I always tell customers, the only place our cattle get shown is in the salering on sale day,” Jon says. “We run our cattle kind of like a commercial herd. They don't get pampered and fluffed like a lot of show cattle do.”

But this year Jon and Breezy decided they would try something different. They donated a heifer to be shown and then sold at the Black Hills Stock Show to help support the Black Hills Angus Association's scholarship fund.

“We thought it would be a great way to advertise — sort of like a walking billboard — and we'd also be able to support youth in agriculture,” Jon explains. The heifer showed well, won her class and sold for \$3,100.

“It is good promotion,” Jon says. “That heifer will probably be shown again, and she'll always have our ranch name as part of her name, so it ends up being pretty cheap advertising for us.”

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► The Mitchell family includes (from left) Chip, Mitzi, Tyrel, Belinda and Brandon.



► Jon and Breezy are busy taking care of son Ryle and daughter Kobi in addition to the Angus bulls and heifers they raise every year.

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Jon continues, "Breezy and I had been talking about doing something to help the local ag kids. We considered donating a bull or heifer at our sale, but we decided to try something a little different — to show the heifer at the Stock Show. It turned out really well. We might consider showing another one in the future."

Son Ryle, 4, and daughter Kobi, 1, will have the option of showing cattle when they get old enough, Jon says. "If they want to show, we'll help them out. If they don't want to, that's fine."

Jon definitely foresees Ryle and Kobi joining and being involved in the National Junior Angus Association.

"It's a great organization," he explains. "There are so many things for them to do, even if they don't want to show."

### Amidst the traffic

Teaming up with Millar Angus to help with the scholarship project, Amanda (17) and Jessica (14) Kammerer of nearby Piedmont, S.D., volunteered to halter break and fit the donated heifer for the show.

It wasn't their first time in the showing. "We like to show at the Black Hills Stock Show. It's close — a hometown thing," Amanda says. The girls also show their home-raised registered Angus cattle, as well as sheep and hogs, at the Central States Fair in Rapid City every August; the Western Junior Livestock Show, also in Rapid City, in October; local county fairs; and the North American International Livestock Exposition (NILE) in Billings, Mont.

"I enjoy showing," Amanda says. "Other

people have their hobbies, their interests; I like to do this."

Amanda and Jessica know the definition of teamwork and sacrifice. When they are choosing their show animals out of the family herd early in the summer, they have been known to argue about who will get to show which animal. But things always seem to smooth out in the end, and they work together to prepare for the big day.

"Jessica does the washing, and I'm the blower," Amanda says.

Younger brothers Jake, 12, and Dillon, 6, have some pretty big shoes to fill, but Mom and Dad, Matt and April Kammerer, expect the boys will handle it pretty easily.

"Jake is already getting involved in showing livestock, too, and Dillon probably will soon," Matt says. The kids are an integral part of the cattle operation, helping with daily chores, and all of them are handy in a branding corral, riding a horse, sorting or whatever needs to be done horseback.

Although the kids don't let him go in the showing anymore, Matt values the Black Hills Stock Show for the advertising opportunities. "About three-fourths of my bulls sell to producers within 20 miles of here, so even if my cattle don't place at the top of their class, they are here, in the middle of the foot traffic, and they have the chance to be seen by a lot of local ranchers."

Matt says the females he raises and shows help him sell bulls later on.

"People see a heifer we have and think, 'I'd like to buy a bull to produce heifers like that.' We've always focused on maternal traits and disposition, and that has worked well for us."

When a producer stops to visit with the Kammerer family, they aren't quickly forgotten.

"Our philosophy is we develop friendships, not customers," Matt says. "When someone can believe in you as a person, they know they can come bid on your bulls with confidence." The Kammerers sell about 30 head of bulls annually at Belle Fourche Livestock.

While the Kammerer youngsters generally choose their show prospects from within the family herd, occasionally they buy one. In fact, a purchase was made at the 2011 Black Hills Stock Show. The Millar Angus heifer the girls had volunteered to train, fit and show to help with the scholarship program ended up going home in their trailer.

"We're really excited about her," Amanda says. "We'll show her in the futurity class at the Central States Fair this summer, and we hope she'll raise us some show calves."

### Broadening their market

Charles "Chip" Mitchell and sons Brandon and Tyrel also appreciate the chance to exhibit the results of their breeding program at the Black Hills Stock Show every year.

"The reason we show at the Stock Show is that it is local for us, only 90 miles from here," says Chip Mitchell of Kadoka, S.D. "It is good advertising for the area we live in; there are a lot of customers there."

According to Chip, the purpose of showing an animal is to let the world see what kind of cattle they are raising. "Everything we've shown has been raised here on the place," Chip says. Besides the Black Hills Stock Show, they have also taken pens of three and individual animals to local county fairs.

Again, the younger generation has taken the reins — or the lead rope — and the responsibility of prepping and showing cattle.

"I used to do it, but now they leave me home to do the work," says Chip with a chuckle. "I usually like to go and watch, but this year with the weather the way it was, I couldn't get away. The Stock Show itself is usually a fun winter break for everyone, as long as the weather will allow ranchers to get away for a day."

Elder son Brandon says the general state of the economy, and especially the condition of the cattle livestock market, has a strong influence on the Angus sale hosted during the Black Hills Stock Show.

"The quality of the cattle there is top-notch, so the sale is usually strong, but if the cattle market is down, sale prices are down,



► Hardy Millar bulls make it through a South Dakota winter looking fleshy and healthy.

too,” he says. “We had a really good sale this year, especially considering the extreme winter weather we had that day.”

Brandon says he talked to lots of folks at the Black Hills Stock Show who were optimistic about the cattle market. “When the cattle market is strong, a rancher will go ahead and get that new piece of equipment or that new bull. When the market is down, we tend to hold out for next year. That affects the entire economy.”

The Mitchells believe that getting their cattle in front of the crowds at the Black Hills Stock Show has helped broaden their customer base.

“One year we sold a bull to a gentleman from down by Yankton, S.D., and then he

told his neighbors about us, and they both returned to buy more bulls,” Chip said. Another show bull went north, almost to the Canadian border.

Good relationships are crucial to the Mitchell Angus operation. Chip and his wife, Mitzi; son Brandon; and daughter-in-law Belinda operate together, caring for their herds of commercial and registered black and red Angus cattle. Younger son Tyrel, who recently graduated from college, is also working on the place and building his own cow herd. The three men work together to artificially inseminate (AI) their own registered cows, and they also hire out to do AI work for neighbors.

After the boys left home for college, Chip

and Mitzi decided they needed to remedy the “empty nest syndrome” by mentoring some local church kids. Before they knew it, they had gotten the ranch kids involved in showing cattle, something the youngsters had always wanted to do. “They are neighbors of ours, who use our bulls, so it was pretty exciting for us and also a lot of fun for them,” Chip says.

Mitchell Angus bulls are sold private treaty beginning in February.

Chances are these showmen and women will be back to the Black Hills Stock Show next year. They hope to see you there on Angus Day. 