



# Bright Now

Never mind a bright future, a young brother and sister are going full steam ahead with their Georgia cow herd now.

Story & photos by **Becky Mills**, field editor

**T**alk to almost any member of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), and they'll tell you they want to stay connected to the cattle business. When they get too old to show as juniors, they'll often put their former show heifers to work in their parents' herd until they can finish college and come back to the home operation, or possibly even start their own herd.

Chandler and Callie Akins didn't wait.

In 2012, Parrish, their father, decided to sell his cows so he could concentrate on row crops. It hardly seemed to be the time for the Nashville, Ga., brother and sister to jump into the cow-calf business. Chandler was 21 and a senior at the University of Georgia—Athens (UGA), 225 miles from their Nashville, Ga., home. He was also living and working at Partisover Ranch, near UGA. Callie was 17, finishing up her last year of home school.

At first, the two talked about just keeping their former show heifers, which by then numbered 25.

"We were going to hand-pick five or six of Daddy's registered cows," Chandler says. "We had been going to production sales as a family and had input in picking all those cows. We saw where progress could be made with those genetics."

They were hardly amateurs when it came to picking out good cattle. Parrish had been on the UGA judging team when he was in school. Chandler and Callie apparently inherited the judging genes. Both were active in 4-H judging. Then Chandler went to Butler Community College in El Dorado, Kan., where he was on the judging team, then followed in Parrish's boot steps by earning a spot on the UGA judging team. Callie would soon follow Chandler to Butler and their judging team, and this fall will start at Oklahoma State University, where she'll be on the judging team.

So, their dad made them an offer they couldn't refuse. He sold them

► **Above:** Chandler and Callie Akins saw the potential in their father's cow herd and bought it from him while they were still in school.

the 50-cow herd at commercial bred-cow prices.

"I thought they'd do a good job," he says. "They needed a start. ... They'd already proven themselves."

## Making it work

While he was at Butler, Chandler earned All-American status in junior college livestock judging. Half the points come from academic grades and the other half come from judging at Louisville, Kansas City, Denver and Houston.

While Callie hadn't made it to Butler yet — where, by the way, she mirrored Chandler by also becoming an All-American — she was a master 4-H'er in heifer showmanship and, like Chandler, had numerous champion and reserve champion trophies with both heifers and steers at the local and state level.

While they may have inherited the judging genes from Parrish, it quickly became evident



they inherited their business sense from their mother, Sara, who graduated from UGA with an ag economics degree and worked for Farm Credit and a commercial bank until she turned full-time home-school teacher.

Chandler and Callie had college money in the bank, earned from showing heifers and steers. Rather than use it, Chandler got a student loan.

"You don't have to pay interest until you graduate," he says. "We just have a little left to pay."

There is also the challenge of managing a cow herd long distance. So far, not a problem. The first year, while Chandler was still at UGA, Callie synchronized the cows and heifers while friend and mentor Kurt Childers bred them. Now Chandler is at home — at least part of the time.

"I'm here two-thirds of the time," he says. "I help Daddy with the row crops and manage the cows." The other third of the time he is off at shows and sales, clipping, fitting and marketing cattle. "I try to limit my off-farm work to one week a month."

Chandler, who is now 24, adds, "The first group of AI (artificial insemination) and embryo transfer (ET) calves are born the end of September. I make sure I'm home then."

Now, because it is Callie's turn away at college, the 20-year-old is only home during summers and the very occasional weekend.

"I take care of the records and most of the books," she says. "It works out since Chandler doesn't enjoy it."



► Parrish Akins sold his cow herd to his son and daughter so he could invest more time in his row crops.



► Brother and sister Chandler and Callie Akins are equal partners in Akins Cattle Enterprise.

Then of course there is always Parrish. Not to mention Sara, who bought her own 50-cow commercial herd after Parrish sold his cows to Chandler and Callie.

"They are the only reason we're able to have the cows," says Chandler. "It wouldn't be feasible otherwise. We're not self-sustaining by any means."

They are hardly freeloaders, though. For now, the owners of Akins Cattle Enterprise (that would be Chandler and Callie) split production costs with their mom. However, they do use their dad's equipment. They also provide labor.

"We get commandeered while we are at home," Chandler notes.

"They work for their daddy like there is no tomorrow," says Sara.

In the meantime, the two younger Akins

are using their judging experience, as well as reproductive technology, to focus on quality rather than quantity. "We want to grow internally," says Chandler.

Callie emphasizes, "We want to make those 50 as good as we can."

However, there are no extremes in this South Georgia herd.

"We breed performance cattle, but they also have to have strong maternal value," says Chandler.

Callie adds, "We like good, functional cattle that are sound and good-looking."

### Choosing Angus

Starting with their first show heifer, the focus has been and is on Angus.

"Initially, we were drawn to the Angus

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breed because of its popularity,” says Callie. “We chose to show Angus cattle because we knew they would maintain and increase their value outside the showing. They make the perfect base for our cow herd because they are so versatile. The Angus cow allows us to meet the demands of both the commercial and seedstock producer.”

While they do also breed SimAngus cattle, Chandler says, “We try to keep more Angus cows in the herd. If you don’t have good Angus females, you don’t have good SimAngus.”

Under the heading of making their cows the best they can be, they sent one cow they own in partnership to TransOva in South Dakota for *in vitro* fertilization to make sexed heifer embryos. They’ve also sent two cows to Kurt Childers to flush.

“We were farming, so it was simpler to let him do all of it,” says Chandler. Even when they aren’t flushing cows, the first breeding in their 60-day season is by AI.

“It is kind of frustrating not to be here, but it is always exciting to come home and see how much progress has been made,” says Callie.

When it comes to marketing, they have a three-tier program. They sell a handful of show heifers private treaty and market 14- to 16-month-old bulls private treaty off the farm. The feeder-quality calves are marketed through Moseley Bros. Cattle. The replacement quality females stay in their herd.

In addition, the brother-sister duo plans



► Sara Akins (center) gave daughter Callie and son Chandler a strong home-school education.

to add a fourth tier to that marketing program. “We’re planning a bull sale in December. That’s our first leap of faith,” says Chandler.

The sale will be near their South Georgia farm and will include established Angus operations like Britt Angus, Partisover Ranch, Broad River Farms, Oleo Ranch, Fenton Farms and Eddins Farms.

Partisover’s Randy Daniel has faith in the young producers.

“I sold them calves all through their show careers, and we had Chandler for three years,” Daniel explains. “Chandler and Callie have integrity, people skills and a work ethic. That will carry them a long way.”

The Colbert, Ga., purebred breeder also says, “Even with the age difference, it is an

equal partnership. Akins Cattle Enterprise is not in name only. They are making decisions and paying bills.”

Kurt Childers is also in their corner.

“They are at the right age where they are in tune to marketing cattle through the Internet and communicating through social media,” he says. “They also have the grassroots knowledge.”

The Barney, Ga., cattleman says, “They’ve had tremendous show and livestock judging careers. They are learning about financing, although it can be a challenge for them at times. They also have good enough heads on them they not only look at next month, but look two years ahead to plan a bull sale.”

Childers adds, “Both kids have a great head for business and a tremendous eye for cattle. I would partner with them on any donor.”

In maybe the greatest show of faith, though, Childers trusts Callie with his granddaughter. She is halter training three show heifers for 11-year-old Kennedy Williams.

Sara says that is only right.

“There are so many people who invested in them,” she says. “John and Marcia Callaway, Randy Daniel. Lots of good people. They were smart enough to take advantage of the opportunity, but I told them they need to go to the barn and find those little kids and take the time with them that people took with them.”

As for their dad, he has no regrets about the 2012 sale.

“My granddaddy, their great-granddaddy, was the salt of the earth, a good farmer and a good businessman,” he says. “They are the same way. The future is bright.”

**AJ**

**Editor’s Note:** *Becky Mills is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Cuthbert, Ga.*