

Beating the Buzzer



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Students explain how national competition improves knowledge of the beef industry.

by *Shelby Mettlen*, assistant editor

Bzzz. A red light flashes as Troy King, a now-former senior in animal science at the University of Minnesota (U of M), buzzes in with the correct answer.

A pause from Jason Ahola, moderator of the 2016 National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF) National Collegiate Beef Quiz Bowl and associate professor of beef production systems at Colorado State University (CSU).

"That is correct," Ahola says.

King and his teammates, Rebecca Church, Sarah Marketon and Trevor Otte have just defeated Pennsylvania State University and Oregon State University to take home first place at the NCF Quiz Bowl, hosted annually at the Cattle Industry Convention & National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Trade Show, this year in San Diego, Calif.

King graduated in December 2015 and is moving on to North Dakota State University to pursue a master's degree in beef reproduction. He says the quiz bowl is a great experience for undergraduate students in the beef industry.

"I learned a lot about the cattle industry just by practicing, studying facts and hearing different questions," he says.

Making connections

King is a native of Caledonia, Minn., where he grew up on his family's Angus farm. In high school and college, he worked for a local Angus breeder who managed about 300 registered-Angus cows.

His favorite aspect of the Angus breed is the people, King says.

"It's obviously a progressive breed with a lot of desirable and versatile traits, but the people are really great," he says.

In the beef business, it can be easy to fall into tradition and "just do things the way Dad did." King says the competition challenges students to think progressively and to stay sharp.

"There are a lot of statistics you don't think about or acknowledge in daily work on the farm," King says of competing in the event. "I think the competition keeps you sharp on those and makes you think."

The NCF Quiz Bowl is the final round of a series of competitions in the American Society of Animal Science Academic Quadrathlon. The competition was first hosted in 1990 in Nashville at the National Cattlemen's Convention. Teams from

colleges across the country, representing the East, Midwest, South and West compete in the Quadrathlon to earn a spot at the competition each year.

Ahola, who formed and advises CSU's seedstock merchandising team and manages the university's 180-head purebred Angus and Hereford cow herd, says the competition stretches the minds of students, not only with respect to the beef industry, but in other animal agriculture industries and aspects of animal science, as well.

"It encourages knowledge and confidence in knowledge," he says. It's not just about beating everyone else to that buzzer — it's about knowing you're the one with the right answer.

"We want these students to develop not only knowledge of the beef industry that they can take back to their own operations and use in their careers, but we also want them to develop the confidence to use this knowledge without hesitation," Ahola says. "We want them to have knowledge with confidence."

Rebecca Church is no stranger to the Angus breed, either.

Last year, she served as the industry

► **Above:** Members of the winning University of Minnesota beef quiz bowl team were (from left) Troy King and Rebecca Church, and Sarah Marketon (second from right) and Trevor Otte (right). Presenting the award were Linda Davis, National Cattlemen's Foundation (third from left) and Sarah Cortese, director of communications for Farm Credit (fourth from left).

information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) from her home in Hastings, Minn. Church grew up showing cattle and sheep on her family's hobby farm.

"We usually just buy a couple of show steers or market heifers," Church says. "I've also leased Limousin heifers to show for the past five years or so."

Her mother serves as a 4-H program coordinator, and Church is a fourth-generation 4-Her.

"My family and I were quite involved in 4-H," she says. "I think being involved in 4-H and showing cattle and other animals is an advantage because it exposes you to positions of leadership and that can really be important in the real world."

Church is a junior at U of M, majoring in agricultural communications and marketing. She says working with CAB was a great

opportunity for her and introduced her to a more technical style of writing than creative blog writing. That experience is crucial, she says.

"At U of M, there aren't that many ag classes that prepare you for marketing and advertising specifically in agriculture," she explains. "I want to focus on building my skills and working to apply them."

Church says her goal is to work with a livestock marketing firm or business — which is why being rewarded with a trip to San Diego to compete in the NCF Quiz Bowl was such a great opportunity. In a word, it provided opportunity for networking.

"This conference is a huge networking event," King says. "I think getting students involved in an event like this by using their knowledge of the beef industry is a great thing for us."

Ahola agrees that networking with professionals is a huge part of the competition and a goal among colleges and team leaders.

"It brings a number of students in and brings them to a major event to meet beef leaders," he says. "It brings like-minded students and professionals together with a desire to learn more and share their existing ideas."

"It forces these students to think quickly, but to know their answers are correct," Ahola says. That's a lesson that will put young producers ahead in the beef business, too.

To beat the buzzer, in competition and in business, you must be quick on the draw, confident in your aim and accurate with your shot.

It's a lesson future beef leaders should learn early and practice often.

