

Improvement + Growth

Young producer practices what he preaches.

Story & photos by **Barb Baylor Anderson**

Have a conversation with Chad Daugherty and one thing is clear: The 29-year-old beef producer from Cerro Gordo, Ill., weaves improvement and growth into both his job and his industry contributions. Daugherty manages Blue Ridge Cattle, with locations in Monticello and Carlisle, Ky. He is also chairman of the new Illinois Beef Association (IBA) Young Producer Council (YPC).

“Our goal is to raise functional cattle that are high-performance and high-growth,” says Daugherty of their herd management goals. “We take what we have and continuously try and make it better.”

His views of the YPC are not entirely different.

“The YPC was created last year to involve more young people in our association and grow them into industry leadership positions. The opportunities for education and networking will make us better producers and help us maintain a strong beef industry.”

Enhancing the herd

Daugherty first got interested in cattle spending time on his grandfather's farm. Originally from Clinton, Ill., he started showing cattle in junior high school. His wife, Nicole Sperry, daughter of George Sperry from Macomb, Ill., grew up in the Angus business as part of Shilo Farms in the Lamoine Valley. After George Sperry passed away in 2008, the couple brought a few head from Nicole's home place. They now have nine cows of their own.

Blue Ridge Cattle is a 200-head, red and black Angus herd owned by partners Steve Koss, Monticello, Ill., and Paul Mulhollem, Carlisle, Ky. Koss and Mulhollem began the partnership while the two were neighbors. Mulhollem moved to Kentucky, and the cattle partnership continued with farms in both locations. Koss also raises row crops and seed in Illinois.

“Last fall, we were able to turn the cattle out on seed-corn stalks on September 10 with some protein supplement. We did not have to start feeding until December 23,” says Daugherty, “Our approach to nutrition is economical, but functional. We look for cows that fit in that system.”

Daugherty says the emphasis at both locations is on producing purebred cattle that



► “I know young producers are busy,” Chad Daugherty acknowledges, adding that he is busy as well. “But I am not too busy to be involved in the future of my industry. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it.”

perform well, from pasture to feedyard. Cows must convert forage efficiently and maximize pounds to remain in the herd. Daugherty does not creep-feed the calves. They are on milk and grass only.

Blue Ridge maintains more than 60 head in Illinois that are primarily replacement heifers and commercial recipients. The farm has capacity for up to 90 head. The rest of the cows, more than 130 registered Angus, graze on 700 acres of grass in Kentucky.

“Replacement heifers go on feed in Illinois, calve and move to Kentucky as 2-year-olds,” says Daugherty. “In Kentucky, we do not overpopulate the grass. We want the cows to make the most of the forage. We always want more than the recommended value of forage available.”

Blue Ridge's two calving seasons run from about Jan. 20 to the end of March and Sept. 10 through November — windows Daugherty continuously tries to tighten. Cows are artificially bred twice before a red Angus bull is turned in with the red Angus cows and a black Angus bull with the black cows.

“We pick bulls with good growth numbers that complement our cows' EPDs,” he says. “We are not unlike most progressive producers. We want moderate-birth-weight cows that excel on the carcass end. We are not producing show cattle. We want real-world-use cattle that will perform for commercial and purebred producers in Illinois, Kentucky or anywhere else.”

In addition to always looking for ways to improve the cow herd, Daugherty is assisting with improvements in the farm's infrastructure that will allow them to better manage the herd. A new office is being built in one of the outbuildings, with a view of the farm from the windows. Storage is under construction to house equipment, and a new hoop barn was recently completed to provide shelter and solid footing for easier winter-feeding of the heifers.

Building the industry

In much the same way Daugherty improves and grows the Blue Ridge business, he is offering the same as chairman of the Illinois YPC. An inaugural meeting for the group was convened in September 2011 with 27 producers in attendance. The second gathering last December drew 37 producers.

“We plan to try and meet about every other month for educational sessions and social interaction,” he says, noting that at the December meeting producers learned more about the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program and the national YPC program. Producers also had the opportunity to become certified in the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program. “We plan in the near future to tour feed and meat-processing facilities, as well as beef feedlots and other operations.”

The YPC targets beef producers between

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the ages of 18 and 35, but Daugherty says anyone is welcome to join. IBA membership is not a prerequisite.

"I am hopeful producers will want to join the association once they get involved with YPC," he says. "I think we could easily get 100 people involved with our program. We will see what types of issues are of most interest to Illinois beef producers and try and provide information about those issues. The more they get involved, the more we will be prepared for the future."

Activities also allow for professional networking opportunities.

"I get to meet more people within the state's beef industry I might not otherwise meet," he says. "Some producers have commercial cow herds, some have feedlots and others are purebred cow-calf producers. Most of them are going to need cattle at some point. You don't have to go to every sale or advertise in every publication to meet the people that can influence your business."

Daugherty says often his parents' and grandparents' generations are providing the bulk of leadership for organizations. When young leaders can join with those people



► "We take what we have and continuously try and make it better," says Chad Daugherty. The philosophy is true of his role as manager of Blue Ridge Cattle and as a founding member of the Illinois Young Producers Council.

on boards and committees, he says so much more learning can take place throughout the generations.

"I know young producers are busy. I split my time between two farm locations. Nicole and I have a 2-year-old daughter, Haley, and are expecting a baby. But I am not too busy

to be involved in the future of my industry," he says. "If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it."

For more information about the Illinois YPC, contact Daugherty at daugherty-82@hotmail.com or 217-494-9371. Details also can be obtained from the IBA website at www.illinoisbeef.com.