

# Eyes Wide Open

Angus producer Matt Perrier says NCBA's Young Cattlemen's Conference helps open participants' eyes to the industry.

by *Crystal Albers*

It's difficult to find time to consider different sectors of the beef industry when you're busy meeting bull customers, vaccinating calves, artificially inseminating (AIing) heifers and cows and completing other tasks on the infinite checklist of everyday to-dos around the ranch. But doing so may provide for the future of individual farm families, says Matt Perrier, Eureka, Kan., Angus breeder.

Perrier represented the American Angus Association at the 2006 National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC) June 1-8. One of 47 young cattle producers selected to participate in the comprehensive program, Perrier boarded numerous buses, taxis and planes to complete an eight-day nationwide tour that he says opened his eyes to the interconnected workings of the beef industry.

"It opens your eyes to the many challenges that we have as an overall industry, but it also demonstrates just how connected the industry is and the many opportunities out there to market products or cattle in a different way," Perrier says of the conference, now in its 27th year.

The program, sponsored by Tyson Fresh Meats, Five Rivers Cattle Feeding, John Deere, and NCBA and its affiliates, provides

participants with a vast array of experiences that serve as an open window into different industry sectors — from the feedyard to foodservice, from the trading floor to the legislative floor.

"The Young Cattlemen's Conference is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for participants to enhance their knowledge of the industry and lay the groundwork for leadership roles," NCBA President-elect John Queen says.

## All aboard

NCBA headquarters in Denver, Colo., served as the first stop on the tour.

During nearly three days of meetings, participants met NCBA's management team; received an overview of the organization, its policies and promotional efforts; and participated in a Cattle-Fax industry outlook session and a spokesperson-training seminar.

Perrier says he was surprised at the organization's breadth. "They're working on so many different industry issues on a daily basis," he says. "Even if we as producers don't agree with every single policy statement that NCBA has, we all should (be) supportive of what they're doing because there are so



► Angus producer Matt Perrier, Eureka, Kan., represented the American Angus Association during the 2006 YCC.

many other things that they're doing for private property rights, lobbying and beef promotion."

From Denver, Perrier and other participants boarded a bus to Ulysses, Kan., where they toured Grant County Feeders, a 112,000-head capacity feedyard considered one of the largest in the world. Following



► Forty-seven young cattle producers were selected to participate in the eight-day conference, which involved extensive travel. Stops included meat processing facilities, retail stores, a feedlot, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, a seedstock operation and the nation's capitol.



►YCC cattle producers gather in the U.S. House of Representatives Ag Committee room for a briefing.

the extensive tour, the group was off to South Sioux City, Neb., home to Tyson Fresh Meats' flagship facility capable of processing 5,000 head of cattle per day. While there, Perrier says he was impressed by members of Tyson's senior management team, who were surprisingly open to some tough questions.

"I was impressed with their openness and willingness to talk about some pretty tough issues and their outlooks on beef industry trends," Perrier adds. "From a production standpoint, sometimes they have a whole lot better idea of what we're producing than we do."

The Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), the next stop on the tour, allowed participants to tour the trading "pit" and visit with executives heavily involved in beef trading sectors. Also in Chicago, the Bruss Co. provided an opportunity to witness the high-end foodservice side of the business. The fabrication facility showed conference-goers how boxed beef can be transformed into custom-order portions for restaurant chains such as LongHorn® Steakhouse.

"[Bruss Co. representatives] commended producers for the work they have done relative to the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)

program," Perrier says. During the tour, company officials credited cattlemen with transforming the top sirloin — historically a highly variable cut — to a consistent, high-quality cut simply by moving injection sites from the rear of the animal to the neck. "Millions of dollars are being added to the industry based on that cut alone," Perrier says, referring to comments made by Bruss staff. "It goes to show that producers truly can add value to our bottom line by simply listening to our customers and consumers."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 92

## Building future leaders

Designed to promote future beef industry leaders and sharpen leadership skills, the Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC) takes participants from National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) headquarters in Denver, Colo., to meat processing facilities, a foodservice location, retail stores, a feedlot, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), a seedstock operation, numerous other stops and Washington, D.C.

Since the first trip in 1980, more than 500 young cattlemen have participated in the eight-day tour. Most participants are nominated by their respective NCBA affiliates.

This year, the American Angus Association named Matt Perrier of Eureka, Kan., its 2006 YCC nominee. Perrier had submitted his application to the Angus Foundation, which funds YCC candidate travels, including flight costs and registration fees.

Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president says the YCC sponsorship provides both long-term and short-term benefits to the breed and the industry. "One of the three primary emphasis areas of the Angus Foundation's mission is education," he says.

"The Young Cattlemen's Conference is a premier opportunity for the Angus Foundation to sponsor an Angus breeder and young cattlemen to further develop their leadership qualities and help them become even more knowledgeable about all facets of the beef cattle industry."

Applicants must be NCBA members between the ages of 25 and 50. Applications to the Angus Foundation must be postmarked no later than Jan. 5, 2007.

Perrier says he encourages others to apply for the YCC opportunity. "There's a void of young leadership in the beef industry," he says. "I think there are plenty of talented leaders out there, but not a lot of folks are stepping forward to take leadership roles.

"I encourage people to take every opportunity, whether it be YCC, or similar events that state associations offer. Anytime folks can attend something like this and open eyes up to a new perspective in our business, I think it helps us all."

For more information about YCC sponsorship opportunities, visit [www.angusfoundation.org](http://www.angusfoundation.org) or contact the Angus Foundation at (816) 383-5100.

## On the Hill

From Chicago, the group traveled to Washington, D.C., where participants met legislators and lobbied Congressmen. Topics of discussion ranged from trade with Japan to permanent repeal of estate taxes. Animal identification (ID), with its uncertainty and lack of progress, was also discussed.

During a White House briefing, participants met with several liaisons to President Bush, including Barry Jackson, deputy assistant to the President; Keith Hennessey, deputy assistant to the President for economic policy; and Reynolds Kiefer, the National Security Council's director of Iraq.

Meetings with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials were also on the tour agenda, and participants enjoyed a meal and tour at Whitestone Farms, an Angus operation near Aldie, Va.

Of issues addressed during YCC, Perrier says, "We talked a lot about pricing of beef and cattle and passing value back down the chain — from retail and foodservice back to the feedyard, back to the stocker and cow-calf guy to, ultimately, the seedstock producer. Those got to be pretty interesting issues.

"Marketing and pricing of our product drew as much attention and conversation as anything."

## And out of the pasture

During the conference, Perrier enjoyed meeting the many well-informed, progressive cattlemen in the group. "It was impressive to me to see the level of knowledge, dedication and interest that this group had in making the industry more business-focused," he says. "They tore apart issues and talked about some things in a way that I haven't heard beef industry folks do in a while."

In fact, the conversation and experiences Perrier participated in during the trip have given him a new perspective on the business — one that includes the bigger picture.

"The beef industry is so much more diverse and requires people to know so much more about so many more things than just what it is they do in their own pastures," Perrier notes. "It's more important today than ever to have a basic knowledge of each sector of our beef industry, not just the area in which we work in on a daily basis."

Joining and getting involved in a trade association such as NCBA gives cattle producers opportunities to learn about those sectors and shape the future for generations to come, Perrier adds. "We've



►Above: Perrier (far right) visits with Neal Ruhd of South Dakota and Cathy East of Safeway during a trip to a Denver retail location.

got to get proactive and be a part of a solution to these issues," he says. "Angus members need to get out there and join NCBA and their state affiliates and not just pay their membership, but also be a part of the industry. If we're not, it's pretty hard for us to sit around and throw rocks at those who make decisions that we don't like."

Perrier plans to apply his newly found outlook at his family's Dalebanks Angus operation.

"We've got to look at decisions, whether it be breeding, management or customer service, and ask ourselves how they will position our customers to run their businesses in a more profitable manner," he says. "You have to take a broader look and consider more than just 'How do we produce bulls that are worth as much money as possible?' It's just a lot bigger scope than that."



►Whitestone Farm, Aldie, Va., served as a tour stop. Participants viewed the Angus seedstock operation and enjoyed a meal.

