

# Talking & Blogging About Beef

As a member of this year's National Beef Ambassador Team, Nebraska's Ellie Hoffschneider has learned about connecting with consumers face-to-face and online.

by Kindra Gordon

Consumers want to hear the real stories of farmers and ranchers, not just numbers and statistics. That's the lesson 20-year-old Ellie Hoffschneider has learned this past year as she has traveled the country as a member of the 2010 National Beef Ambassador Team.

Hoffschneider, who grew up on a small Angus operation in eastern Nebraska and will be a sophomore ag journalism student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln this fall, is one of five college-age students serving as an industry spokesperson through the National Beef Ambassador program this year. The beef ambassadors are chosen through a national competition administered by the

American National CattleWomen (ANCW) each October, and their year of training and service runs from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31.

Hoffschneider tells that one of their initial trainings last January was in Wooster, Ohio, for a "Building Blocks" workshop to learn about leadership, as well as the *Certified*

*Angus Beef*® (CAB®) program. In late January, the student team also attended the annual Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio, where they received training on media relations, social networking and blogs.

"It was at this time that our team made a goal of increasing our online communications," says Hoffschneider of the ambassador team's efforts to better inform the general public about the beef industry this year.



Ellie Hoffschneider

## Reaching out online

During the past year, Hoffschneider and her teammates have been blogging, tweeting and putting posts on Facebook about their experiences and knowledge of the beef

industry. Their comments capture moments from their everyday lives as young beef producers — from caring for cattle and the joys of calving season to preparing for the county fair. (Visit their blog at [www.beefambassador.com](http://www.beefambassador.com).)

Hoffschneider says she had never

blogged or tweeted before, but through the experience she has had the opportunity to have conversations about the beef industry with folks from her hometown and around the world.

"I've answered questions about grass-fed beef for a man in the United Kingdom and had a good conversation about beef safety with an Australian — all from my laptop in my Lincoln, Nebraska, dorm room," she says.

Similarly, Hoffschneider says that during her travels as a beef ambassador she has found that consumers just want to talk with real farmers and ranchers about what they do — not just hear about a bunch of statistics.

Hoffschneider learned this firsthand in June, while she and another ambassador attended the Food and Wine Show on the National Harbor in Maryland.

"We were wearing our 'I heart beef' shirts and a guy walked up to us and asked if we raised cattle," says Hoffschneider as she retells the story. "I responded, 'Yes,' and he then asked, 'Are you guys bad, and by bad I mean corporate?'"

Hoffschneider says, "I couldn't help myself; I started chuckling a bit, and the guy smiled when I said that my family place could hardly be described as corporate.

I then began the spiel about how 97% of farms and ranches are family owned, but he stopped me, he didn't want to hear statistics."

She continues, "That was the lesson I learned that day, numbers can only go so far. Consumers want to hear the voices of farmers and ranchers, not the numbers. . . . Blogging online has revealed the same truth."

## More ambassadors needed

Hoffschneider says she hopes to encourage others in the beef industry to share their stories as well.

"Don't be afraid to speak up," she says,

## Ag, Angus part of Hoffschneider's passion

Ellie Hoffschneider's passion for the beef industry started even before she was born. She tells that her grandfather owned a ranch in western Nebraska, but he passed away before she was born. Hoffschneider says that even though she never had a chance to know him, when she works with the cattle on their family Angus operation near Arlington, Neb., she feels closer to him and part of that legacy.

Today, the Hoffschneider family raises about 30 registered Angus cows and sells some seedstock bulls and heifers annually.

Through her upbringing in 4-H, FFA and the Nebraska and National Junior Angus associations, Hoffschneider says she has also developed a passion for communications.

"I first started with giving speeches about my bucket calf in 4-H and grew to representing Nebraska in Public Speaking at National FFA Convention with a speech about beef quality grades," she explains. "In the past year, I served as president of the Nebraska Junior Angus Association, and have shown at seven National Junior Angus Shows (NJAS)."

Hoffschneider has also competed in the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off, team sales, public speaking, and extemporaneous speaking contests at NJAS, and she served as Junior co-host of the 2010 NJAS in Denver.

"I love cattle, and the folks that raise beef, so speaking for them was a natural decision," Hoffschneider says of her desire to become a National Beef Ambassador.

As an ag journalism major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Hoffschneider intends to pursue a career in agriculture and continue informing the public about the industry she knows and loves.

**Editor's Note:** *Ellie Hoffschneider's grandfather was Otto Uhrig. His Nebraska Angus operation was featured in an Angus Journal written by Dick Spader in the 1970s. Ellie thinks her grandfather would be very proud to know that she is following in his footsteps by also having a feature in the Angus Journal.*

“and also don’t get discouraged when you can’t answer every question. I’ve been stumped a time or two, and not everyone will understand your story the first time you tell it.”

But Hoffschneider says she is fueled by advice from a beef industry leader who once said to their beef ambassador team: “If you don’t tell your story [about beef], someone else will, and chances are you won’t like what they say.”

Hoffschneider is particularly passionate that youth in the beef industry can be powerful advocates for agriculture.

“I once heard a media person talk about the power of youth,” she shares. “He said if adults write a letter to the editor or make a statement, it doesn’t hold the same power as a young person who does those same actions.”

That’s why Hoffschneider believes the beef ambassador team has such a positive impact. With their training in public relations and their enthusiasm for the beef industry, Hoffschneider says, “The beef ambassadors are able to connect with so many consumers that the rancher working hard to raise his cattle every day can’t take the time to do. We

travel, we spread the word, and we learn and grow ourselves.

“This may be officially a one-year promotion, but I know I’ll be an ambassador for the beef industry for life,” she concludes.



**Editor’s Note:** *To assist beef producers and leaders in advocating for their industry, Hoffschneider says the Masters of Beef Advocacy program is useful in equipping individuals with public relations skills and facts to provide more power to your own personal story. Contact your state beef council to get started with the program.*