

A Legacy of Leaders



LEAD conference strives to build and strengthen leadership in Angus juniors while providing networking opportunities.

by JD Rosman, communications intern

As Brody Fitzgerald stepped off the plane and was slapped in the face with a fierce blast of 100°+ air, he knew he had indeed landed in Phoenix, Ariz. Despite the fact he could literally fry an egg on the sidewalk, the seasoned Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) veteran was eager to brave the heat in order to strengthen and build relationships and grow as a leader within the agriculture industry.

The annual LEAD conference is hosted by the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and travels across the country to provide juniors between the ages of 14 and 21 an inside look into agriculture in a different region of the United States. More than just exposing participants to agriculture, LEAD strives to help build and strengthen leaders within the Angus industry by allowing juniors the unique opportunity to network with fellow Angus enthusiasts and industry professionals.

Hailing from West Grove, Pa., Fitzgerald joined his Angus comrades in Phoenix, eager to experience agriculture in the southwestern United States.

Just as the scenery varies from region to region, so does the agricultural landscape.

“We don’t have agriculture like this on the East Coast,” Fitzgerald says. “We are used to belly-high grass on our cattle, and now we’ve actually set foot in the desert here.”

Sometimes seeing is believing, and by allowing these juniors the opportunity to witness firsthand what other parts of

the country have to offer, perspectives are broadened.

Different exposure

Attending his fifth LEAD conference, Fitzgerald has seen a wide range of climates, landscapes, and industries within the United States. From Seattle, Wash., in 2015 to New Orleans, La., in 2013 to Saint Louis, Mo., in 2011, Fitzgerald’s travels have exposed him to a variety of locations and surroundings, yet

► **Above:** One hundred eight NJAA members from 28 states and Canada met in Phoenix, Ariz., Aug. 4-7.

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► Eric Shoop (center) catches up with friends from Kansas.

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► **Above:** Juniors were able to tour throughout Arizona and see landmark features such as the tourist attraction Hole in the Rock.

► **Below:** Industry professionals gave juniors insight into how to grow as leaders.



► **Above:** Alex Rogen played host in “Angus Family Feud,” testing juniors’ knowledge on key attributes of the Angus breed.

► **Below:** Culture and traditions embody the agriculture industry. Juniors were able to experience local cultures while in Phoenix.



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he says nothing compares to the vast diversity of agriculture the southwest has to offer.

While at LEAD, juniors had the opportunity to experience Arizona's agricultural diversity by touring Agritopia, an urban agriculture center; Queen Creek Olive Mill; Arid Zone Trees; Danzeisen Dairy; and Pinal Feeding Co., a 150,000-head-capacity, all-dairy feedlot.

"It was really eye-opening to see a feedlot of that size," Fitzgerald says. "I've never seen anything like it, and I thought we had a lot of work back home!"

While broadening their knowledge and understanding of the agriculture industry as they travel from one tour stop to the next, juniors like Fitzgerald are also strengthening relationships with fellow Angus leaders. As attendees bellowed "Don't Stop Believing" at the top of their lungs, they formed bonds that will last a lifetime.

"My first LEAD, I didn't really know anyone," Fitzgerald says. "Now, though, to this day I can't even count how many friends I've made through the Association."

"Throughout the years of coming to LEAD, it has changed me as a person. I enjoy meeting new people and finding out who they are and what they do," he adds.

New kids on the block

As the LEAD veterans energetically belt out the chorus, "... hold on to that feeling, street lights, people ...," first-time LEAD attendee McKayla Raines couldn't help but join in. The energy and enthusiasm was infectious.

"The connections I've made while at LEAD have been with juniors from across the country," Raines of Seaman, Ohio, says. "I never would have met them had it not been for LEAD."

"I've never been to a conference like this, so being the new kid has its own challenges, but this is a great group of people to be around," she continues.

Raines says whether participating in a highly competitive game of musical chairs, touring the agricultural venues or learning from industry professionals, juniors come away with a wealth of knowledge, while at the same time forming lasting bonds and developing the skills to rise to the top as leaders within the industry.

"Being able to see agriculture from a different perspective than what I am used to back home and to see how agriculture is in a new place broadens all of our perspectives and brings us closer to each other," Raines says.

As the newly appointed chairman of the National Junior Angus Board, Macy Perry of Prather, Calif., knows how vital it



► Director of Events and Education Jaclyn Clark found herself in trouble with the law while at western town Rawhide.



► Above: AGI Director of Genetic Service Kelli Retallick shared with juniors the tools available to them to move their herd forward.





► From industry leaders, juniors learned about marketing techniques, genetic technologies and to never give up on their dreams.

is for juniors to be immersed in all types of agriculture and says the junior board strives to give them a hands-on experience wherever LEAD goes.

“We work to give our members a personal view of agriculture in a different region each year,” Perry says. “As future leaders in the industry, these experiences will help them see there is more to the ag world than showing cattle.”

Perry says it’s important for all agriculturalists to have a good understanding of the varied facets of agriculture and to be

able to look back at an experience and draw knowledge and insight from it.

“Going to places like an urban farm, such as Agritopia, shows us how even those who live in cities can also be involved in agriculture,” Perry says. “While it may not be able to feed the world solely on their production methods alone, it is a great way to educate and inform those who may be several generations removed from the farm.”

Through tours and workshops, juniors are exposed to a myriad of agriculture enterprises and technology, all instrumental

in advancing the Angus breed. Juniors were able to attend breakout sessions from Focus Marketing, Angus Genetics Inc. and *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand Chef Ashley Pado.

“While these professionals are offering advice and tools to the juniors to advance their Angus herd, they are also serving as role models and offer advice on how to grow as leaders,” Perry says.

As a past LEAD participant herself, Perry has experienced both sides of what LEAD has to offer.

“We want [juniors] to love this experience,” Perry says. “We put on these conferences for them. We want them to come here and meet new people and then go home and be like, ‘Hey, Mom and Dad, I just had the best week ever!’”

“My first LEAD I met so many people, some of whom are my best friends today,” she says. “I hope these juniors go home and are excited about meeting people from all areas of the country and hope they stay in touch with one another.”

As a humble chairman, Perry says getting to see the smiles on the juniors’ faces as they make new friends makes all the work worth it in the end.

Drawing from her personal experiences as an NJAA member and LEAD attendee, Perry’s goal is to give the future generation of Angus youth a positive and fulfilling opportunity.

“[The NJAB] doesn’t do this for ourselves. We don’t do this for the green jacket,” Perry says. “We do it for the juniors.”

AJ

Editor’s Note: JD Rosman was the 2016 communications intern for Angus Media. He continues to work with Angus Media as a freelancer while attending Oklahoma State University.



► Left, above & right: Entertainment came in the form of a hypnotist, convincing juniors a Hereford bull was in with their Angus donors.

