



# MAKING ANGUS HER DESTINY

Illinois junior Morgan Hutchins plans to make a lifetime commitment to the Angus breed.

Story & photos by *Shelby Mettlen*, assistant editor

**M**organ Hutchins has seven years of experience on the show circuit, but don't let that fool you — she's only 15.

The fourth-generation Angus breeder from Charleston, Ill., doesn't think much of it, though. Her father, grandparents and great-grandparents made their lives with Angus cattle.

"I'm just continuing the tradition," she says.

Ohio natives Brian and Lora Hutchins began their Angus herd, Destiny Angus, in Tennessee, where Brian was filling his current role as vice president of business development for Rural King, the largest privately owned farm store chain in the country. Now based in Illinois, the couple travels the country watching their only daughter do what she does best: show cattle.

## An early start

Like many National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members, Morgan has been traveling to the National Junior Angus

Show (NJAS) since she could begin showing at just 8 years old.

"Preparing for this show is probably more stressful than any other show," she admits of the NJAS. Up at the crack of dawn, she brings calves into the barn as early as 6 a.m. prior to show season to prep them for the biggest show of the summer. They're rinsed and fed twice a day; their hair is worked; they're under fans to become accustomed to the noise; and they're exercised outside to help lessen the impact of heat at the show.

"Anything we can do to get them ready," Morgan says.

"She does it all," Lora says.

Brian agrees. Morgan puts together her own feed rations and show supplies, and she helps recruit college students from Lake Land College in Mattoon, Ill., to help on the farm.

"One thing she'll probably start doing here before long is making breeding decisions," he says. "She's already started looking into bulls and figuring out what bulls we need to be breeding to. We use a lot of our own

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genetics, but you can't narrow your sire group too much. You really need to expand beyond your own progeny. That's something she's helping do."

Morgan was just 7 years old when she decided she wanted to show her first heifer. "Mom and Dad weren't sure about it,"

she admits. “They were like, ‘Well, I’m not sure you’re going to like it. It’s a lot of work.’ I wanted to at least try it, and I just fell in love with cows. I’ve been doing it ever since.”

It all started with a show heifer, but Morgan says bulls are her true love.

“Bulls are my favorite thing to show because I’ve always bonded more with bulls,” she says. “Not that you can’t love a show heifer — I love all my show heifers,” she clarifies, “but bulls tend to stick to one person.”

Some people find them intimidating, she says, but she likes their predictability. Heifers in heat can cause problems.

“There’s no surprises like there are with heifers,” she explains.

## The show of the summer

Preparing for NJAS with bulls is a little different than it is with heifers, Morgan explains. Destiny Angus breeds bulls to go to work out West, so show maintenance is a little different.

“We can’t bring them into the barns and have a lot of hair on them, because they have to know how to survive in the real world,” Morgan says. “If you go and look at our bulls, they’re going to have some hair, but they’re going to be slicked down, because after this most of them are going to go out and breed cows. It’s their last show, pretty much. Guys have already bought their breeding rights after their show careers, and there’s a few that will be selling this fall in our sale.”

Despite differences between bulls and heifers, the goal is the same: Set up the animals to dominate the showing.

Show day is different than any other day, Morgan says. “It’s definitely the most stressful day for anyone that’s here.”

Sleep isn’t really a thing at the NJAS, and the Hutchins family will be up at about 3:30 a.m. to begin preparing for the day. Cattle are washed and dried; their hair is worked; they’re fed, watered, exercised and, finally, fitted just before entering the showing.

“The fitting is the most stressful part,” she says. “You have to make sure you time it out; make sure you aren’t late for the classes.”

Inside the ring, Morgan admits she isn’t nervous as much as she is excited.

“I hate waiting for the judge to pick!” she says, admitting that winning a division and moving on to the championship can be nerve-racking. “Being excited is what I like to be, not nervous.”

All her attention focuses on the judge.

“Just be yourself in the ring,” she offers. “I



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don’t care about anything else but the judge. I don’t care about any of the other animals; I don’t care about any of the other people — just the judge. Anything you can do to get the judge to look at your animal.”

## Learning new things, seeing old friends

Junior nationals is the most exciting show to be at, Morgan says, not just because of all the great cattle, but because of the opportunities to see friends from across the country.

“The juniors are doing all the work and showing,” she says. “It’s definitely the most fun.”

Activities and contests make NJAS even more fun, she explains.

“The contests are competitive, but [the judges] try to make you as comfortable as they can,” she says. “Don’t be nervous about the contest, think of it as an opportunity to get better at being an Angus breeder.”

This year, Illinois juniors hauled more than 200 head of cattle to Des Moines for the 49th annual NJAS, making it the state with the third-largest number of entries behind Missouri and Iowa.

“There are a lot of cattle here. Illinois definitely takes cattle very seriously,” Morgan laughs. Illinois advisors make sure their juniors compete in plenty of contests, she adds. “They push us, and I appreciate that. The most important thing is to just try

something different, because you never know, you might have a new experience and fall in love with something else.”

Morgan’s favorite contests are the quiz bowl and cattle judging. She’s learned that cattle trait preferences change over the years, and valuing the judge’s comments are important to keeping up with those trends.

“The National Junior Angus Show really does set a foundation for your future,”

Morgan says. Meeting people, dealing with environmental factors like heat, prepping cattle to show and developing skills in contests to use throughout college are all vital skills juniors learn at NJAS.

While learning is important, Morgan admits it’s her friends she looks forward to most about the show.

“There’s nothing better than getting to see all my friends,” she says, adding that she loves walking through the aisles of cattle, but friends are still most important. “At the National Junior Angus Show, I get to see them all at one time. That’s what I like most.”

Mom Lora agrees.

“I enjoy it because of the people,” she says. “I love the competitive nature of it all, but I tell you what, there are some wonderful people in this industry, and I love them. It’s exciting to see some friends we haven’t seen for a while or some that we get to see quite a bit in the showstring. We like the show part, but we do love our friends.”

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### Planning for the future

Morgan plans to attend Lake Land College before heading off to Ohio State University to ultimately practice as a veterinarian. With generations of family having attended Ohio State, she admits, "I'm a Buckeye."

She hopes to open a veterinary practice at home and to eventually retire and show cattle the rest of her life.

"Anytime I'm around cattle, I learn something new," she says. "The NJAS pushes you to be the best you can, to be as involved as you can and to learn from your peers."

Watching their daughter learn and grow as an Angus breeder has been a rewarding experience for the Hutchins couple, and a "relief" to Lora as Morgan has taken on more complicated and specialized tasks.

"I knew it was going to come, but one day it's just like she woke up and decided it was her turn and her time to just take it over," Lora says. "She's been such a great help all these years since she's been showing, but now, she works really hard. We're really proud of her."

Lora takes care of the farm and says she and Brian have turned the majority of the showstring over to Morgan, but Mom and Dad are still there to help.

"We always told her that as long as she loves what she's doing, we'll keep supporting her," Brian says, "but if she wakes up tomorrow and says she doesn't want to show cattle anymore, then we'll just raise cows and calves and get back to trail riding on the weekends," he laughs, adding that the family's Quarter Horses stand in the pasture



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begging to be ridden. "If she ever doesn't love [showing], then we'll just raise cattle."

### Forming their Destiny

Does she ever think she'll wake up and not love it?

"No," she laughs, "I don't think so."

"She loves it," Brian says. "She wants to do a good job. One thing I always told her is if we're going to do it, we're going to do it right, and there are no guarantees you're going to win."

Then again, you just might win. Morgan

has been named Premier Exhibitor at three of her last major shows, Brian adds. "That's been very humbling and exciting all at the same time."

She loves cattle just as much as her dad does, Lora says. "He grew up loving it, so the two of them are a good pair."

Watching Destiny bred-and-owned bulls grow up is a rewarding experience, Brian says.

"It's great to see all your hard work hopefully be put back into your herd or be sold to hopefully help another herd's genetics."

Today, the Destiny Angus herd includes about 40 cows and heifers, and during its online sale Aug. 22, 20 calves and bulls, along with embryos and semen, were expected to sell.

The farm's name can raise questions of its origin.

"Driving on the interstate," Lora laughs, "that's where it came up."

Brian elaborates.

"We started our farm in Tennessee. We're from Ohio, so we knew someday we would move, and we didn't want to have a name that was related to the farm or the properties we owned," he explains. "We always felt like it was our destiny to show cattle and have Angus cattle. We always felt it was our destiny to own an Angus farm."



PHOTO BY LEANN SCHLEICHER