



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE,

ONE CLASS AT A TIME

NJAS cattle judging contest instills life skills in Angus youth.

Story & photos by *Morgan Marley, communications intern*

The stands were full of Angus juniors with determined looks on their faces and pencils scratching on clipboards during the cattle judging contest at the 2017 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Des Moines, Iowa.

The NJAS brings more to its juniors than a ring for exhibiting their cattle in front of judges. There are countless competitions, educational clinics and activities for Angus juniors to get involved and start building their skill set early.

“I like to attend junior nationals because it’s more than a cattle show,” says Cade Lyyski, Ellensburg, Wash. “You get to meet a lot of new people from all across the country. There’s also a number of contests and educational clinics to attend.”

Each contest at the NJAS focuses on further developing Angus youth’s professional

skills. The cattle judging contest specifically focuses on teaching Angus youth to be more confident decision-makers, detail-oriented and, of course, better livestock evaluators.

“There’s a lot of value in attending the cattle judging as a contest,” Lyyski says.

“Obviously to show and raise good Angus cattle, you need to know how to pick them and what to look for in an animal.”

To show good cattle, you need to know what a good one looks like. Most judging coaches preach to their teams: place the good ones up and the bad ones down.

There are a lot of qualities to look for when judging a class of cattle. For breeding stock, optimal skeletal structure, body condition, functionality and attractiveness are the desired priority traits. On the other hand, market animals need to express plenty of muscle shape, be sound in their skeletal

makeup, yet still be powerful and functional. Still, everyone who shows or raises livestock has his or her own personal preference of what they like best.

“When judging a class of heifers, I like to look for one that’s big bodied, deep ribbed, very stout in her foot and bone, as well as very functional,” Lyyski says. “She needs to be able to travel when she’s out either nursing a calf or getting to water and food. I also like one that’s pretty through her front end.”

Beyond teaching kids how to evaluate an animal’s conformation, livestock judging instills qualities young people need to be successful in the workforce.

“I think it’s valuable for younger kids to be involved in judging because it gets them started competing at a younger age,” Lyyski says. “It also starts building skills such as decision-making and public speaking much

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earlier in life, and it teaches you how to look at the livestock even younger to better understand how to raise good cattle.”

An early start

At the NJAS, there are plenty of younger Angus juniors judging cattle alongside the older kids at every event.

“I like participating in the livestock judging contest, because I want to learn how to pick out my own cattle,” says Hailey Jentz, age 12, Belmont, Wis. “It’s a work in progress.”

Most judging contests are long and require constant thinking, which can be tiring to anyone. It isn’t the most exciting contest at the NJAS, but judging does hold a lot of promise for youth development.

“At the judging contest, we sat up in the stands; they brought classes of cattle in; and we had to judge them on what we thought looked best,” Jentz says. “I look for square feet, depth in the belly and a clean front.”

Classes typically last 10-15 minutes. After



PHOTO BY JD ROSMAN

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seeing the animals’ profile, behind and on the move, evaluators have to make their final decisions for placing the cattle.

“At the judging contest, you go through all the classes and you look at them and place the animals how you want them,” Jentz says. “On the Scantron there are different placings listed, and you fill in the corresponding bubble.”

It is also intended to be a learning experience. At the end of the contest, the

official judges critique the classes, presenting the juniors the opportunity to compare their notes with the professionals.

“I learned a lot from the judges’ critique, such as different positions to look at the cattle and how to predict future value,” Jentz says. “Overall, it was a lot of fun.”

A promising future

At 17 years old, Lyyski already knows he wants to attend college in Texas or Oklahoma. The potential of competing on a livestock judging team is much more promising in that area of the country than in his home state of Washington, he reasons.

“Livestock judging presents kids with a lot of opportunity,” Lyyski says. “You can travel the country and see livestock that are nationally competitive.”

On a collegiate livestock judging team, in addition to judging cattle, participants also learn to evaluate swine, sheep, goats and occasionally horses. Although reasons are not a part of the NJAS cattle judging contest, livestock judging teaches youth how to defend their decisions for placing a class of animals by presenting oral reasons to an official.

The networking and traveling opportunities collegiate livestock judging offers prepares youth in ways no other competitive event can begin to compare.



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