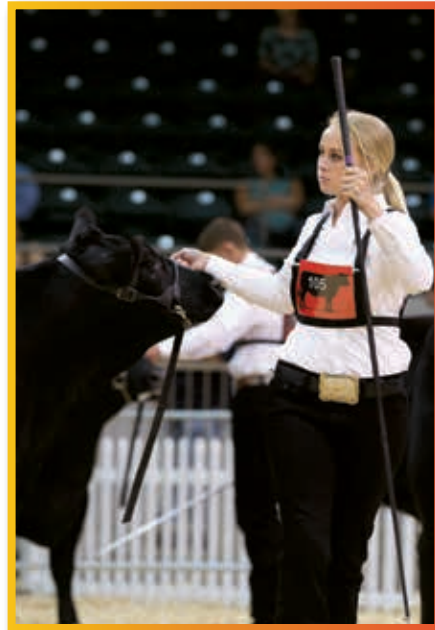




► Michelle Keyes, Springfield, Neb., shows how to set up an animal when stopped in the showing. She says it's important to make sure the legs are lined up with the back leg closest to the showman staggered.



► An important part of showing is keeping your eye on the judge, says Keyes. Maintain eye contact whenever possible, always be aware of where the judge is in the ring and be ready for any instructions the judge might give.

Advice from the Ring

Elite showman and judges share tips on how to succeed in the showing.

Story & photos by **Nicole Lane**, editorial intern

The National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest represents some of the best showmen in the country. Earning a spot to represent their state, these showmen don white shirts and black pants to compete for the title of No. 1 Angus showman in the nation. What does it take to get to this elite level? Top-15 competitor Michelle Keyes from Springfield, Neb., shares her tips on how to be successful in the showing.

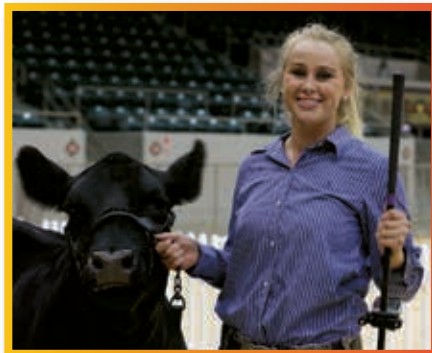
A third-generation Angus producer, Keyes has shown cattle since

she was a Clover Kid in 4-H. When she got into high school she joined the Nebraska Junior Angus Association and began competing in shows year-round, exhibiting in an average of 20 shows per year. Although she says it was challenging to balance show life

with her activities, it was well worth it.

"I learned a lot about the industry," Keyes explains.

"It was a great way to gain more knowledge about agriculture as a whole and be with people who share the same passion for cattle that you do."



To become a better showman, Keyes recommends watching older members in the showing.

"I always used to sit on the edge of the ring and watch and watch and watch the elite showmen," Keyes says. "I told my dad that I wanted to be one of those elite showmen, and so I worked at every show to get better."

Besides working with your animal, she says watching is one of the best things one can do to prepare to get in the ring and be competitive.

"Watch the older showmen, watch what they do and watch the ones that win and ask them questions," she recommends. "Once you get out of the ring, don't be afraid to ask if the judge has any tips for you."

Two of this year's showmanship judges, John McCurry and Danielle Foster, agree. Foster says, "You've got to take advantage of the opportunities to learn from older showmen and showmanship workshops."

McCurry also recommends asking for advice from multiple people because there are numerous show styles. He recommends getting help mastering the basics first, then looking for a way to add your own unique style.

Constant improvement

Keyes' goal when she walks in the showmanship ring each time is to get to the next round. She says a lot of people



► When showing Angus cattle, it's best to have the ears facing forward, also referred to as "true ears." Keyes recommends that after setting up the calf's feet and legs, lightly blowing on the animal's nose can get them to move their ears forward to polish off the look.



► When stopping the animal, she demonstrates, it's important to keep the head up and straight in line with the back.



► To help set the legs properly when stopping, Keyes shows how to leverage your own legs and feet to get the animal to stop its front feet in line with each other.

are obviously there to win, but every time she enters the ring she is trying to exhibit her animal well and also become a better showman.

"I act like every class is showmanship class," she says. "You are there to win, so present the animal the best that you can."

Although the competition is fierce, it isn't worth the work if it's not enjoyable. She says some days in the ring are great and others don't always go as planned, but it helps to stay focused on what you can control. Above all, no matter what happens, remain cool, calm and collected.

"You really just have to have fun with it," says Keyes. "You can't control everything. You can only do so much, but if you stay calm it will help your animal stay calm for the most part. You can't control if there is something that upsets it, but you can control how you react to it."

For showing attire, Keyes prefers a light-colored button-down shirt and dark jeans. She says not to worry about the brand; focus instead on looking clean and professional. For girls, she recommends wearing hair back and out of the face to prevent it from being a distraction. Although she's personally not into a lot of extra glitz in the showing, she says her favorite addition to her showmanship attire is a simple string of pearls.

"It's not about showing you, you are



► Keyes explains that sometimes the animal will elevate its back causing it to do what is called "popping its top." To fix this, "loin it" by taking the show stick and lightly pressing or scratching the top of its back to help maintain a balanced pose while in the ring.

showing the calf, and that needs to be the main focus," she says.

In describing the perfect showman Keyes envisions someone who is clean and presentable, classy and humble, and one who is unique in their style but doesn't stand out more than their animal.

"I strive to be a showman that enjoys myself in the ring but am still there for

business while remaining clean and professional and doing my best to stay cool, calm and collected," she says.

The best way to get to that elite level? Get out in the ring and do it.

Keyes advises, "Just get in the ring and confidence will come."

