

# The Art of Herdsmanship

Chris and Sharee Sankey, 6N Ranch, honored with the 2015 Herdsman of the Year award.

Story by **Jena McRell**, digital editor; photos by **Carrie Heitman**, Creative Media manager

**F**or the Sankey family, holidays are often celebrated in a cattle barn.

Breeding and showing registered-Angus cattle has been a family tradition for more than a century, tracing back generations for both Chris and Sharee, who own and operate Sankey's 6N Ranch in Council Grove, Kan.

Even though their children have moved a few states away — Cody and his wife, Lindsay, live in Indiana; and Jeana and her husband, Dustin, are in South Dakota — the family is together more often than one might expect.

"We could not do what we do without our kids," Chris Sankey says. "We all spend

four or five days together traveling and attending shows. It may not be Christmas, Thanksgiving or the other holidays everyone else gets together for, but this business has provided us a lifestyle that's extremely special to our family."

A week at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., never disappoints. For the Angus breed, the NWSS often sets the pace for the coming year. Between the showing and the auction arena, the breed's leading genetics are on display as ranchers discuss plans and make purchases to take back to their operations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 102



► Surrounded by family, Chris and Sharee Sankey receive Herdsman of the Year honors. Pictured are (from left) Cody and Lindsay Sankey; Chris and Sharee Sankey; and Jeana, Bayler and Dustin Hurlbut.



# WESTERN



► Chris and Sharee parade their bull through the ring at the National Western Angus Bull Sale.



## The Art of Herdsmanship CONTINUED FROM PAGE 100

This year, the Sankeys brought seven head to compete in Angus events, including the American Angus Association's annual bull sale show and the Roll of Victory (ROV) bull and female shows. Both Chris and Sharee led Angus bulls into the championship drive for the bull sale show.

### A special honor

The week's best surprise, they say, was being recognized with the 2015 Herdsman of the Year award, an honor that's voted on by their fellow exhibitors at the show.

"For us the herdsman award is an honor we didn't expect," Chris Sankey says. "We've spent our whole life seeing the people who receive this award — people we admire and who are extremely good at what they do. To put us in that category is pretty humbling for us."

A successful herdsman, Chris explains, is someone who breeds cattle, cares for them, presents them well and successfully promotes their program. They are known throughout the barns as people who are dedicated to the cattle, the Angus breed and passionate about marketing their operations.

"Herdsmanship is more about portraying your lifestyle," Sharee Sankey says. "It starts at home, and when you come here, you're really zeroed in on getting ready to show. It's such an awesome honor to win, because you've been voted on by your friends and the people that think you do a good job."

Breeding Angus cattle is certainly a lifestyle for the Sankeys. They both come from a long line of Angus ranchers, and after they graduated from college, Chris and Sharee

began building their Angus herd in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Today, they manage a purebred cow-calf operation on more than 2,000 acres.

"On our ranch, we do all the work," Sharee says. "We breed them, we raise them, we feed them and we lead them. When we are here at the National Western, it's a family business. Our kids help, and it's really exciting to watch our family's legacy in Angus cattle continue."

### The stock show tradition

Chris and Sharee also have a long history at the NWSS. Growing up, they both exhibited cattle as part of the junior Angus heifer show and remember being struck by the grandiose Stadium Arena, where the cattle shows take place, and the excitement surrounding such a competitive livestock event.

"The National Western is pretty dear to my heart," Sharee says. "I've been coming since the middle 1960s as a young girl showing Angus in the junior show, clear up to now in the open show. It's a pretty special place." Chris and Sharee were married in 1978 and soon after made their first trip to the NWSS as a married couple. Since both their families held such regard for the Angus breed, they knew attending the NWSS would be a tradition.



► The week's best surprise, the Sankeys say, was being recognized with the 2015 Herdsman of the Year award, an honor that's voted on by their fellow exhibitors at the show.

"Raising cattle is our lifestyle. It's just the way we go about making a living," Chris says. "It's the same thing hundreds of thousands of other ranchers do. We take care of our livestock, pray for good weather, hope everything works out and keep moving ahead."

The NWSS is a blur of activity for the Sankeys, as they work nonstop to ensure their cattle are prepared to enter the show or sale with their best foot forward. Everyone pitches in, and their stall in the cattle barn is humming with activity. Friends and customers stop by to chat, and the clock ticks until it's time for the next event.

Quietly in the chaos, granddaughter Bayler Maree Hurlburt catches an afternoon nap. Tucked away between feed buckets, clippers and combs, she represents the family's next chapter of the Angus story.

Sharee says with a smile: "We have a lot more National Junior Angus Shows and National Western Stock Shows in our future."



► "We could not do what we do without our kids," Chris Sankey says. "We all spend four or five days together traveling and attending shows. It may not be Christmas, Thanksgiving or the other holidays everyone else gets together for, but this business has provided us a lifestyle that's extremely special to our family."