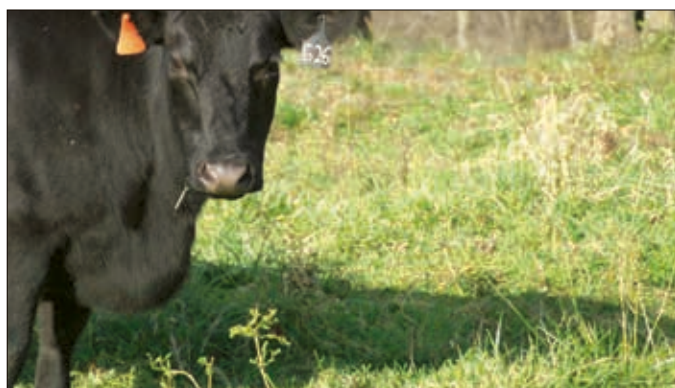


Top 15 Photo

Advice to improve photo entries for the NJAS Photo Contest.

by *Lynsey Meharg, intern*

As a young photographer, there are many things to juggle at one time other than your camera. Finding the perfect subject, framing the shot just the way you want it and then having the object of your attention be less than cooperative is a common frustration for aspiring agricultural photographers. Never fear! After viewing the quality level of entries for the 2013 National Junior Angus Association (NJAA)/*Angus Journal* Photo Contest, there is no question Angus juniors have incredible talent. For those looking to further improve their skill level, here is a list of photo tips from the *Angus Journal* staff.



► Framing and cropping errors are distracting and can make a photo seem unfinished.



1. Photograph Angus cattle

Picturing black Angus cattle may seem like common sense for the Angus cattle division, but having exclusively Angus throughout your photos can increase your chances of having your photo used in the *Angus Journal*. After all, we are serving our breed.



2. Use several orientations

While we tend to get in the habit of taking horizontal pictures, some subjects would actually be framed better in a vertical shot. Also, taking vertical photos can improve your chances of having your photo appear on the cover of the *Angus Journal*. Using both vertical and horizontal photos can help you make the most of your shot.



3. Framing and cropping

Framing (choosing where to set the outer boundaries of your photo while taking the picture) and cropping photos can be tricky. Always make sure ears and hooves are visible and not continuing out of the frame unless you intend to select one aspect of a calf — an eye or nose, for example — as your point of focus. Cropping out body parts, whether the photo is of cattle or people, is distracting to the viewer and can make a photo seem unfinished. Unfortunately, when you send a photo to a processor for enlargement, some portions of the photo may be automatically cropped, cutting off part of your picture. Have your photo printed where you can control the image that's printed or be sure to send instructions with your order to specify what part of the picture to prioritize.

4. Maintain sharp focus

Maintaining sharp focus on your subject makes for a crisp, eye-catching image that offers more dimension and quality. Manually focusing on a subject will allow you to select what you would like the main point of your photo to be. Try using manual focus instead of auto focus to hone in on your subject.



► Sharp details can help create a stunning image. You may need to use manual focus to define what you want to be in focus.

5. Find subject matter

Always have a clear subject, and focus on that aspect of your photo. A photographer should be able to steer a viewer to the part of the photo that is intended to be the

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focal point. Good subject matter includes a clear subject and elements that create interest, such as clouds.

6. Find clean backgrounds

Make sure you have a good background for your photo. Your subject may look amazing, but if the photo has a busy background, viewers will be distracted. Grass, hills and trees all make for good backgrounds when photographing livestock. You can sometimes eliminate busy backgrounds by trying the photo at a different angle — get low, get high, get close.

7. Watch shadow placement

Watch where shadows fall in your photos. Shadows can be interesting to incorporate into a shot, but if the shadow falls across an animal's body or makes a picture dark, attention is taken away from the subject. If you're taking a profile view of a show animal, always try to take the photo with your back to the sun so that the shadows will fall behind your subject.



► Shadow can take attention away from the subject.

8. Turn date features off

Turning the date feature on your camera off will make for a better-quality photo that won't have to be cropped. Most computers will automatically log when digital photos are added to an album, so having the date in the image is unnecessary. Turning off the date allows the photo to remain timeless and removes yet another avoidable distraction from your photo.

9. Don't alter photos

Do not alter the content of your photos using Photoshop, Illustrator, Instagram or any other program or app. This includes putting borders on the outside of the photo. Borders and frames are not allowed in the contest to preserve judging being done purely on the photo, rather than on how it is framed. It is the editorial team's policy not to alter photos — other than cropping, adjusting lighting or changing a color photo to a black-and-white image — because doing so would be a misrepresentation of the subject matter.

10. Camera selection tip

Make sure to take your pictures using a device that takes quality photos. Though photos from a phone look fine on a tiny screen, when printed, a photo can become distorted or grainy. To ensure that your photos are the best quality possible, use a digital or film camera instead of a camera phone.

11. Photograph safe content only

Be sure to only photograph safe activities. If your mother

wouldn't approve of the activity you're photographing, you probably shouldn't be doing that in the first place. Be sure that all the subjects of your photo are clear of an animal's feet, as well as other dangerous areas, and that everyone is using good judgment.

12. No swimming cattle, please

Consumers and environmentalists could potentially see photo contest entries, so depicting something with which environmentalists would take issue — such as cattle in a stream or eroding a streambank — would be unadvised. There is a little more leeway with stock ponds, which are built to provide a cooling mechanism and a source of water for livestock but do not provide a human water source.



13. Selecting the correct category

Be sure to enter your photo in the correct category in the photo contest. Though some photos may loosely fit a category, they would probably place better in another. Photos in the cattle division should focus on Angus cattle. Photos in the people division should focus on people. Finding the right photo to fit each category can be difficult, but that's part of the fun to be had with the photo contest.

14. Working with manual settings

Though it may be difficult at first, if you own a camera with manual settings, work to become familiar with them. Manual settings are the next step to becoming a better photographer because you are manually selecting how bright your photos are, whether there will be a blur behind your subject and how fast your camera's shutter opens and closes, among a list of other things. Learning these settings is a valuable skill, and the work will show through in how your photos turn out.

15. Photography is fun

The most important tip to keep in mind for the photo contest is to have fun. Photography can be a relaxing pastime and should be enjoyed. Keep up the good work, and soon enough you'll be submitting even more stunning photos!

