

Illinois Angus Junior Makes Her Mark

Sixteen-year-old says her cows are gentle and quiet, yet she still knows what they need.

Story & photos by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

You can't judge a book by its cover. While 16-year-old Sierra Day is admittedly quiet when you first meet her, it doesn't take long to read between the lines that this young woman knows her cattle. She's certainly not shy about pursuing her passion to build a solid Angus herd, either.

"I think part of my interest in the Angus business is that the cows are a lot like me. They are quiet, but I know what they need," says the Cerro Gordo, Ill., teenager. "I love watching them grow from the time they are born. Cattle are just No. 1 with me."

Sierra Day owns a small Angus herd with her younger brother, Chayton, age 10. Sierra owns five cows and Chayton owns three. Her mother, Cheryl, and her father, Mike, farm 4,000 acres with extended family. Cheryl is a freelance writer and staff editor at *Feedstuffs* and Mike is a certified crop adviser.

"I think I inherited my mom's passion for cattle," says Sierra. "She had a swing for me in the barn when I was a baby. I have been around it all my life. This is what I know and love."

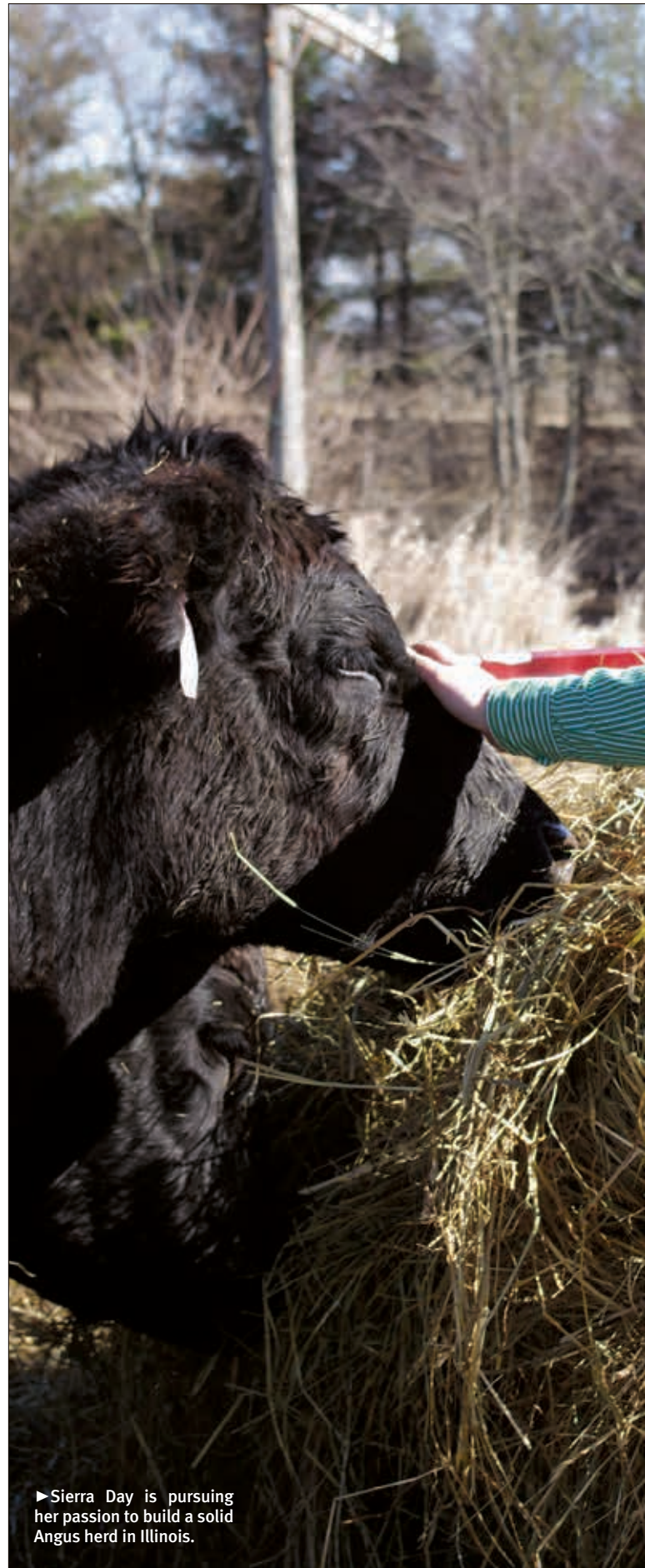
Placing emphasis on genetics

Sierra embraces the opportunity to make herd selection decisions. She places importance on quality and genetics. She often purchases cattle from Prairie View Farms, owned by Alan Miller in Gridley, Ill.

Her brother favors different genetic options available from Hoffman Angus, owned by Chad Hoffman, Colfax, Ill. Sierra will spend hours looking at available animals and studying genetic packages before making crucial purchasing decisions about heifers that will excel in the showing and as foundation females.

"I look for low birth weight (BW) and high weaning weight (WW) and yearling weight (YW) and milk," says Sierra, adding they artificially inseminate (AI) all of their cows. "I also look at disposition. We prefer to work with calmer animals, especially since Chayton is still learning. If a cow cannot get along with Chayton, then it is not a fit for our herd. We want to be able to halter all of our cows."

Once calves are on the ground, Sierra evaluates how they will be



► Sierra Day is pursuing her passion to build a solid Angus herd in Illinois.

"Experience with the Angus group has taught me to roll up my sleeves and get things done."

— Sierra Day



► When it comes to nutrition decisions, Sierra consults with seedstock supplier Alan Miller and feed representative Drew Stollard to learn what is best for her herd.

raised. Top-quality steers and heifers as determined by pedigree and expected progeny differences (EPD) traits are kept initially for the showing. Lower-quality animals are fed for market. She is still considering what to do with an all-bull calf crop this year.

“We encourage the kids to learn the business and make independent decisions about the herd,” says mom Cheryl. “I appreciate that the adults Sierra comes in contact with are willing to treat her like an adult. Breeders work directly with Sierra and help her learn. They answer her questions and use the opportunity to teach her about the Angus business.”

The same is true when it comes to marketing cattle. Sierra has consigned cow-calf pairs to the Illinois Angus Futurity. “When the Futurity committee was here to look at what we wanted to sell, I talked with them about what we had to offer,” says Sierra. “I was glad they selected two cows with heifers for the sale. They recognized our genetic selection and how we fed them.”

Learning the production ropes

When it comes to nutrition decisions, Sierra again has jumped in to learn what is best for her herd. She frequently consults with Alan Miller and her feed representative, Drew Stollard with Earlybird Feed based in Goodfield, Ill.

“We evaluate the animals to formulate a diet for each one. Different

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► “We encourage the kids to learn the business and make independent decisions about the herd,” says mom Cheryl (right), pictured with Sierra and Chayton.

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animals require different things, so we differentiate for each of them and feed them separately,” she says.

Sierra is also beginning to learn how to manage reproduction and health issues. Hoffman provides AI services, which Sierra observes after she has selected, in consultation with her mom, the right bull mate for each female being bred. She hopes to be able to AI at some point. Her father is teaching her how to place and remove CIDR® inserts and help with ear tags and tattoos.

“I am slowly practicing vaccinations, but my dad does most of it,” she says. “When my parents were gone one time, one of the cows was not eating and had digestive issues. I suspected what the problem was, called and talked with them about it, and gave the cow the shot. I think I was more worried about how the cow would respond than anything.”

Gaining lifetime experience

Sierra may be a teenager, but she already has learned much from the Angus business.

“Being involved in this industry has taught me how to communicate and be respectful. I have learned to set my priorities and decide what I want to accomplish,” she says.

Sierra is active with the Illinois Junior Angus Association. She has been on the royalty team for five years, served as a director for two years and show secretary for two years. She currently is second vice president in charge of the display for the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). She has participated in nearly all of the national contests, including creative writing, photography, speaking, poster and the quiz bowl, which her team has won more than once.

“Experience with the Angus group has taught me to roll up my sleeves and get things done,” she says. “I am involved with 4-H and FFA, which has helped me with the business side of raising cattle through speaking and judging and doing livestock records.”

She is one of the top academic students in her high school class, participates in student council and is on the scholastic bowl team. “If I were more active in school activities, it would be hard to balance. My school friends sort of understand what I do, but I don’t have to follow the pack,” she says. “When I can be in the barn, I am in the barn and at sales and shows.”

Most importantly, Sierra says, she has learned achievements are not just measured in the showring. She attended her first national show at age 9 and has continued to work to get class winners. She exhibited the supreme champion at the DuQuoin State Fair last year.

“That taught me that you can get what you want when you work hard for it. Winning is great, but it was the work that went into it that makes me proud,” she says. “I pick my show animals, feed them like they must be fed and show them the way they must be shown, and it pays off.”

Sierra plans to attend junior college and participate in livestock judging before transferring to a four-year school to complete a degree in animal science. She may also pursue a master’s degree in animal reproduction, genetics or nutrition while she continues to raise Angus cattle.



Editor’s Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a field editor located at Edwardsville, Ill.