

Grab Life by the Talons

New internship available through Talon Youth Educational Learning Program; applications available for youth and host breeders.

by **Kasey Brown**, senior associate editor



► Cam Cooper's (left) love of youth led to her ultimate creation of the Talon Youth Educational Learning Program through the Angus Foundation, which now can provide hands-on educational experiences in addition to scholarship support.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ANGUS FOUNDATION

A new internship opportunity through the Angus Foundation and the Angus/Talon Youth Education Learning Program will pair motivated youth with working registered-Angus ranches to give a valuable hands-on educational experience during the summer starting in 2017. Motivated and knowledgeable young people will be the leaders of the next generation of agriculturalists.

Cam's legacy

Camron "Cam" Cooper, a quiet and intensely private woman, was always a champion of youth in agriculture, especially those involved with the Angus breed. She began funding Angus scholarships in 2010 and bequeathed her entire Talon Ranch and its assets, including the cattle, to the Angus Foundation upon her passing in September 2014 to support youth and education through the Angus/Talon Youth Education Learning Program. The Learning Program is now incorporating a summer internship to pair working registered-Angus ranches with motivated youth for an educational experience.

"If we don't help young people, we don't

have a legacy. It is incumbent on us who are able to work with and promote the success of young people. It is the continuity of life," Cooper said in a video interview with Angus Media in 2011.

However, she didn't want praise for her donation, because it simply "was the right thing to do." In a quote in an obituary article by Leesa Zalesky in the *Western Ag Reporter*, Cooper said, "I'm just a tool in this. I'm putting the resources in front of kids who are interested in the cattle business. It's up to them to pursue their dreams, and if my financial support helps them and helps the industry along the way, then the world will be a better place."

Jim Sitz of Sitz Angus Ranch, Dillon, Mont., emphasizes that Cooper loved helping agriculture's youth. "If she liked you, she would do anything for you. Kids only had to ask," he says.

Born the daughter of a farmer who fell victim to the Dust Bowl, she learned her work ethic helping her father in California orchards he managed after moving from Missouri. She

► **Right:** Cooper liked wildlife, especially predatory birds. They inspired the name of the ranch.

studied economics at Stanford University. She earned great success in the corporate world in the 1970s and 1980s, becoming a senior financial executive for Atlantic Richfield (ARCO), one of the first women to hold that position in that type of company. When she was doing business in Butte, Mont., she fell in love with Montana, Sitz says. In the 1990s, she decided to become a seedstock Angus breeder and created the Talon Ranch on the Big Hole River near Twin Bridges, Mont.

Sitz developed a working relationship with



her, even selling some of her bulls in the Sitz Angus Ranch sale, and adds that she was an excellent partner with a good understanding of people and business.

She was always quick to support youth, buying a 4-H steer and pig every year at the county fair, and providing scholarships for area high school kids, Sitz says. This love of youth led to her ultimate creation of the Talon Youth Educational Learning Program through the Angus Foundation, which now will provide hands-on educational experiences in addition to scholarship support.

Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president, explains that Cooper's support of the Angus breed goes well beyond scholarships, and this internship is the last step in the process.

"Cam's vision for the Talon Youth Educational Learning Program was for it to be a holistic experience for students," he explains. "They could come into the program as an undergraduate scholarship recipient — with the opportunity to continue through graduate school — and get real-world experience through this internship. She was a true champion for our Angus youth."

The Talon internship, starting in 2017, will help youth gain a hands-on educational experience, mentorship and insight from a working registered operation. Even if the intern has grown up on a ranch, it is important to gain perspective from other operations.

"There is a real void of qualified people right now in production agriculture and that is why I believe internships are so worthwhile. Finding enthusiastic young people to be part of our team is critical, as labor is one of the most limiting factors we face," says Kevin Yon of Yon Family Farms (YFF), Ridge Spring, S.C. He interned while in school and YFF has offered an internship for the past 25 years.

Benefits of internships

"We've had success with our internship program because we employ young people with a genuine interest in learning. We feel we have an obligation to share what we've learned, to teach. This is really a mentorship," Yon explains.


He says his family and crew didn't realize how much hosting an intern would sharpen their own skills, though he admits it takes time and effort to host a good internship. Interns should not just be a source of cheap labor, but they do need to learn that not all ranch tasks are fun.

Sitz agrees and says his ranch's internship has helped identify future potential employees and even future bull buyers. His father started working with two universities in the early

Talon Ranch donated Angus Foundation heifer package in 2011

For 35 years, the Angus Foundation Heifer Package has been the cornerstone fundraiser for the not-for-profit organization that supports Angus education, youth and research. Year after year, generous donors and buyers come together to provide valuable funds for the future of the Angus breed.

In 2011, that generous donor was Cam Cooper of the Talon Ranch, Twin Bridges, Mont. TR Barbara Perfection 9711 ("Annie") was purchased by Curtis and Ann Long of Briarwood Angus Farms for \$50,000. Due to a health issue, Annie is no longer in the herd, but her 2014 daughter, Briarwood Ms. Perfection 4073, is in the herd and is due to calve in September 2016.



1980s to help students get real ranch experience during busy times of the year.

Both agree that participating in internships helped them in their own operations later. Sitz interned with two different ranches and enjoyed learning two different management styles in two different environments. He learned from the contrasting training processes, and he admits it made him step out of his comfort zone. He says it also made him appreciate home by expanding his thought processes.

Yon says his internships helped culture a desire to be in agriculture. He believes internships are so important that he required his own children to work multiple internships before they could come home to join their family operation.

Both cattlemen say that interns need an educational experience, and sometimes that involves a change in organizing the summer's tasks. Sitz says it is the ranch's responsibility to orchestrate what the intern does. Yon says it's important to get the whole crew on board, especially because the intern would work with all crew members. However, they also say that the intern needs to pull his or her own weight.

Yon adds that YFF participated in the similar past American Angus Association-orchestrated internships, in which the Association paired ranches with youth. Yon says the first intern through the program graduated and drove to South Carolina to Yon's place the very next day. He was such a good fit that he became a full-time employee and was employed at YFF for many years.

Interns and ranches will be paired by Association staff through the Talon Internship Program Advisory Committee, composed of trusted advisors of Cam Cooper. Applications are available for both youth and ranches. Youth studying agriculture in an undergraduate or graduate program, or even those recently graduated who are under 25, are eligible. Preference will be given to those who have received a Talon scholarship. Applications will be available for students June 15 and will be due Sept. 15.

Host breeder applications are available now and will also be due Sept. 15.

For more information or to apply for the internship, visit www.angusfoundation.org or www.angus.org/njaa.



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