



# Proud to

## Young Cattlemen's Conference helps develop leadership skills in U.S. cattle producers.

by **Katie Allen**, director of marketing and public relations, Angus Foundation

**L**isten to consumers about their questions and concerns regarding the beef industry. Have a goal in mind to create a great eating experience for that consumer. Work together closely with other segments of the beef industry, sharing both in the hardships and the successes. And, most importantly, be proud of what you do as a cattleman in raising beef to feed the world.

John Widdowson of Lodgepole, Neb., strives to focus on these things every day at his Angus operation, SandPoint Cattle Co. He received a renewed vision of the pasture-to-plate concept and meeting the needs of beef consumers while attending the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) 33rd Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC) May 31 through June 7. Widdowson applied for and was selected as the Angus Foundation's candidate to attend YCC this year, which marked the 10th year the Angus Foundation sponsored an American Angus Association member's registration and travel expenses for YCC.

"I wanted to participate in the YCC program to broaden my experience level within different sectors of the cattle industry and, without question, build more relationships and add more people to my network," Widdowson says.

More than 50 young cattlemen and women joined together to participate in YCC. The program is a comprehensive, nationwide tour of beef industry sectors, created to enhance leadership skills in beef industry professionals. To qualify for participation, a man or woman must be nominated by one of NCBA's affiliate

PHOTO COURTESY NCBA

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN AND LAURIE WIDDOWSON

► **Above:** John Widdowson says he understands even more the importance of being united as a beef industry that encompasses all sectors.

► **Below:** After graduating from UNL, John and Laurie Widdowson started SandPoint Cattle Co. with 10 cows. Today, the Widdowsons graze about 1,300 registered cows on 12,000 acres and host two annual production sales.



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members, be between the ages of 25 and 50, and be an NCBA member.

“As in the past, it is a pleasure for the Angus Foundation to offer the YCC opportunity to our young adult Angus members,” says Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president. “This annual investment in the education of our members further strengthens the Angus breed’s abilities to help advance the beef cattle industry. YCC participants share the knowledge they gained with their Angus and beef cattle peers afterward, and it’s this exchange of information afterward, from producer to producer and producer to consumer, that is absolutely invaluable to our breed and industry as a whole.”

## A family affair

Widdowson was born and raised in south-central Nebraska on a five-generation family farm and ranch. While majoring in animal science at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Widdowson met Laurie, his wife-to-be. Soon after graduation, they started SandPoint Cattle Co. with only 10 cows. Today, the Widdowsons currently graze about 1,300 registered cows on 12,000 acres and host two annual production sales on the ranch.

Widdowson also enjoys working with his two sons — Maverick, 13, and Maguire, 10 — on a daily basis within their cattle operation. The Widdowson family has been blessed and challenged in many areas of their lives, including the battle they faced in losing a son, Mullen, to brain cancer in September 2008.

Says Widdowson: “The amount of learning experiences, both blessings and hardships, our family faced and endured in this journey is second-to-none.”

He says his hobbies are enjoying and appreciating the little things in life and cherishing every moment with family and friends. Another family favorite is cheering on the Nebraska Cornhuskers on game days.

## An invaluable experience

Taking in life’s finest moments with family and friends happens often when cattle are involved. Widdowson also has taken on a small packing plant in Ovid, Colo., called D&L Meat Co., a full-service packing plant providing processing and retail services. Because of his YCC experience, Widdowson

says he understands even more the importance of being united as a beef industry that encompasses all sectors.

“Our goal should be to allow everyone to have a great eating experience with beef, no matter what segment of the food chain we are in,” Widdowson says. “We definitely need to listen to our consumers and their concerns regarding our industry, whether it’s animal handling and welfare, food safety, food supply, etc. We might not always agree with their concerns, but if they are our customer, then those concerns should be ours, too.”

The eight-day YCC tour included nearly every sector of the beef industry. It began at NCBA headquarters in Denver, Colo., where participants were given an organizational overview of NCBA and the National Beef Checkoff Program.

While in Denver, the group heard from representatives of CattleFax and the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF). They toured a Safeway retail store and learned about Rancher’s Reserve brand beef marketing efforts. The group spent a day in Greeley, Colo., visiting JBS Five Rivers feedyards and processing facilities.

Next, in Chicago, the group met with the senior management of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) at the Chicago Board of Trade. Participants had the chance to watch the activity on the trading floor and witness futures trading firsthand. They also visited Otto & Sons Industries, a family-owned company providing quality products and custom solutions for the food industry since 1909. This tour offered a view of how boxed beef is turned into custom order portions for both major restaurant chains and some of the nation’s top steakhouses.

The group then traveled to Washington, D.C., where participants were greeted at a reception hosted by John Deere. The following morning, the group received an issues briefing from NCBA’s government affairs staff about policy issues currently facing the cattle industry.

Later in the day, these future leaders were given the opportunity to visit one-on-one with members of their state’s congressional delegation, where they expressed their viewpoints regarding the beef industry and their cattle operations. During their

## Association staff learns from the YCC experience

The American Angus Association sponsored staff member Chris Stallo, assistant director of information systems, to attend the 2012 Young Cattlemen’s Conference (YCC). Stallo has worked for the Association in Saint Joseph, Mo., for 12 years. He grew up on a small cow-calf operation in north-central Missouri, and his father and brothers continue to manage the farm today. Stallo enjoys working for the members of the Association to provide quicker, more efficient ways to process their work — allowing them to spend less time in front of the computer and more time in the field.

Stallo and his wife, Suzanne, reside in Platte City, Mo., with their three sons. His hobbies include coaching youth sports and hunting. He graduated from DeVry University with a degree in computer information systems in 1994.

“This was a tremendous opportunity to meet other producers and learn valuable tools to take back home to our operations,” Stallo says. “It’s great to learn how we as producers can have an impact on policy issues, as well.”



► Chris Stallo, American Angus Association assistant director of information systems, says YCC was an opportunity to network, learn and impact policy issues.

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congressional visits, participants focused on issues including the 2012 Farm Bill, federal lands ranching and regulations proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Widdowson says he really grasped how important it is to be on the offense for agriculture, which includes informing people and answering their questions and concerns about the industry rather than running away from the issues. One place beef industry leaders can have their voices heard is on Capitol Hill.

“I was surprised that your voice can be heard and make an impact on Capitol Hill,” Widdowson says. “If you become active and put forth effort in assisting and informing our leadership in Washington, it just doesn’t fall on deaf ears. Good policy can happen.”

The group then traveled to Aldie, Va., for a tour at Whitestone Farms, one of the nation’s elite purebred Angus operations.

Widdowson says that anyone who is contemplating applying for the YCC program should definitely consider the experience.

“I can guarantee that it will be an invaluable experience that they will never forget,” Widdowson says. “Also, I want to thank the entire staff at NCBA for the endless amount of effort and passion they provide on our behalf in representing the beef industry locally and throughout the world. That organization has our backs and fights for our industry every day.”



**Author’s note:** News releases by NCBA contributed to this story.