

Young Cattlemen's Groups Keep Students Plugged Into Industry

Young cattlemen's groups on college campuses keep students connected to industry while offering advocacy and networking opportunities.

Story & photo by **Kim Holt**

Kirstin Slater and Ryan Rademacher may have had to leave their Angus cattle at home when they went to college, but they didn't leave their passion for the beef industry. They put it to work on their college campuses.

Slater, from Bickleton, Wash., is a recent animal science graduate from Washington State University (WSU), Pullman. She showed steers and added registered Angus heifers at the encouragement of her father. Together they built a foundation herd, and she joined her state junior Angus association and took part in state and regional activities and shows.

"I have a big passion for the entire beef industry," she says. "We all need to help each other. Without each other, we have nothing."

Slater currently works at Northwest Farm Credit Services as a financial specialist. Her goal is to figure out what it takes to be successful in farming so that, one day, she can background cattle and run pairs.

Rademacher, from Hermiston, Ore., is a recent University of Idaho (U of I) graduate who has been accepted into veterinary school at both Washington State and Oregon State universities. He got his start in the registered Angus business from Lon and Sheri Wadekamper of LGW Ranch in Hermiston. Over time, he's built his own herd of registered and commercial Angus cattle. His goal is to be a feedlot consulting veterinarian and manage 500 head of commercial cattle of his own, he says.

While at the U of I, Rademacher was president and a four-year member of the Student Idaho Cattle Association (SICA).

"I wanted to stay involved in the industry," he explains, "and SICA is a well-run, pretty active club within the college."

Across the border, the Young Washington Cattlemen's Association (YWCA) was just getting started by Slater and her roommate on the WSU campus. They were already involved in that university's Cougar Cattle Feeders (CCF), a student-led program that custom-feeds producer-donated calves and returns carcass data.

"We knew some of the people in the Washington Cattlemen's Association and decided we wanted to be more involved," Slater explains. "And this was a good way to do that."

YWCA's vision is to provide a peer network to educate members in agriculture and beef advocacy through media, state and

national leadership opportunities. SICA's mission on the U of I campus is to educate students on issues confronting the beef industry, expose them to new and innovative ideas and represent a positive voice for the industry on campus.

Both student groups are invited to cattlemen's association conventions and events, allowing students time to learn, meet and network with member-producers and speakers. SICA also holds an annual spring tour.

Young Cattlemen's Conference

One event, in particular, that Slater and Rademacher discovered through their

student groups was the Pacific Northwest Young Cattlemen's Conference (PNW YCC), developed by the Oregon, Washington and Idaho cattlemen's associations. It was an event both Slater and Rademacher wouldn't have missed.

Some 120 students from seven Northwest colleges and universities participated in this inaugural tour and conference this past winter. For students, this event was nearly expense-free. They just needed to show up on time for the bus and reserve their own night's lodging.

It featured a daylong tour to different industry segments capped off with a roundtable dinner featuring nationally known speakers. These six speakers had traveled to Oregon for the annual Cattleman's Workshop in LaGrande, the final stop for students.

Both Slater and Rademacher give the PNW YCC two thumbs up.

Slater describes it as an "awesome deal. I thought the speakers were top-notch. I don't think there could have been a better speaker."



► Ryan Rademacher and Kirstin Slater stayed connected to the beef industry while in college through their student cattlemen's groups.

Collin Woodall, National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) director of legislative affairs, was especially interesting to her.

"It's amazing how much the government is actually influencing what we do on a daily basis," she says. "I don't think that we realize they are voting on stuff that influences us quite regularly."

YWCA influenced her trip to PNW YCC, Slater says. "It was an opportunity I wouldn't have taken otherwise, because we were encouraged to go. It was an excellent experience. I would recommend it to anybody."

Rademacher says the PNW YCC was a "great deal. For one, it introduces students to different producers from around the area. They can see firsthand different types of operations and what other people are doing within the industry and how they're staying afloat."

He adds, "I really liked the conference. I went to the NCBA convention the next week. A lot of the speakers at the LaGrande conference were some of the keynote speakers at the NCBA convention."

This was Rademacher's second year attending NCBA. Last year he was one of three who went with SICA; this year he interned.

"It was a very interesting experience," he says. "This year I met so many people within NCBA and the industry, and got to network and see how the entire convention is run. That was really interesting."

He had already met NCBA's Tom Field and Forrest Roberts from the PNW YCC. "Seeing them again the next week just built up those relationships even more."

Focus on opportunities

Dave Daley, associate dean of agriculture at California State University, Chico, was also a LaGrande workshop speaker. He told students at the PNW YCC, "I'm very impressed by this; it's a great opportunity. It's one that you need to take advantage of. We need more of you to be optimistic about the future of the business."

Daley encouraged students to get involved in student cattlemen's groups recognized on their college campuses. If they didn't yet have an established group, he encouraged them to get one.

"It's really critical that you do that," he advised, because student groups will form to recognize students for animal rights, animal care, etc., and will pass out literature from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), Farm Sanctuary, etc.

He encouraged students to think of a different approach to confront these groups, however. "Don't spend so much time on the lunatic fringe," he said. "Spend time with the

Diversification helps career preparation

More than 120 Northwest college students gleaned collegiate advice from six nationally known industry professionals during a roundtable at the 2010 Pacific Northwest Young Cattlemen's Conference (PNW YCC). The first PNW YCC was held in conjunction with the annual Cattleman's Workshop, a well-attended regional producer meeting in LaGrande, Ore., each winter.

When asked by the American Angus Association's Regional Manager Rod Wesselman how students could diversify and better prepare in college for today's industry issues, here's what these key leaders had to say:

Forrest Roberts, CEO, National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). Roberts encourages students to find a balance between science and business. Today's issues are complex, so a firm foundation in animal science and business are both necessary.

He also "highly encourages" learning a second language. "That's something that will absolutely serve you well."

He adds that one of the biggest points of value is the ability to apply classroom work through internships and other experiences like the PNW YCC. "These are critically important, as is your ability to establish a network and interact with people."

Tom Field, NCBA executive director of producer education. While Field says he likes to read about the cattle business, he doesn't benefit from doing that exclusively. He spends about 70% of his reading time on subjects, such as history, that have nothing to do with the beef business.

"There's a lot to be learned from [the] historical realm," he says. "History repeats itself."

He also highly encourages students to study overseas at least one semester "to help better understand the world we live in. You can't do this until you're outside of the U.S.," he says. "It gives you a lot better perspective."

Collin Woodall, NCBA executive director of legislative affairs. Woodall encourages students to take public speaking and technical writing classes. He stresses the importance of effective communication.

"Make sure you work not only on your oral skills but your written skills, because it's extremely important to be able to communicate not only with your peers but with consumers, activists and other people we're engaged with day in and day out," he says.

Dave Daley, associate dean, College of Agriculture, California State University, Chico. "Learn to embrace change rather than to resist it," is Daley's advice, and "venture out of your comfort zone." He often plays the devil's advocate in an agricultural systems and issues class so students can look at, understand, discuss and write about both sides of an issue.

"It makes you realize that good people can look out the same window and see different things," he explains. And, in ag, "we don't do that very well."

Daley says if he could give students one skill it would be: "Build trust with people who disagree," so you can dialogue about that subject. "If you can get it, it's one that will serve you well."

Bernie Rollin, distinguished professor, University of Bioethics, Colorado State University, Fort Collins. "Work to utilize the weapons that are being used against you (by activists)," Rollins says. "If you're being attacked with philosophical arguments, don't respond by growling; respond with philosophical arguments. For 30 years, I've been teaching our animal science students to respond, to go toe-to-toe with these people."

He adds that if a class like this isn't offered at your college, demand one.

Kevin Smith, director, export services, U.S. Meat Export Federation. Smith advises students to consider taking classes in political science and international studies. "Having some type of international foundation will definitely help," he says.

He also recommends learning a second language — Spanish, Chinese, etc. — for more career opportunities.

people you have a chance to work with."

Chico's young cattlemen's solution is to focus on opportunities, not argue with the opposition. This group holds a tri-tip BBQ once a month on campus and passes out "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." bumper stickers from the California Beef Council. They sell out 500 sandwiches in two to three hours. They always plan to run out so people want to return.

Daley said bumper stickers are seen on the skateboards and backpacks of students who you'd think would never eat beef. He

explained Chico's biggest service areas are students from San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

"I get to see them all the time, and folks, they don't think like us," he said. "Guess what, they are our future, and they're not all bad people." That's why he encourages agricultural students to forget narrow-mindedness and to connect with people in a positive way.

"We have to think about how we treat people who aren't the same as us, because we

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talk too much to each other," he said. "Don't get mad at the public. Communicate instead of just talk."

NCBA's Executive Director Forrest Roberts encouraged students, as well as all industry members, to get their Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA).

"Take every opportunity that you can to tell your story," he said. "You've got a great story to tell, and this country needs to hear that now probably more than ever."

Slater has her MBA and encourages others to do the same. "It gives you a good resource to go to," she says. The course, which helps prepare individuals to be industry spokespersons, consists of six, one-hour core courses. Slater did hers in one day over Christmas break and saved all information to her computer so she can easily copy and paste when she sends letters to the editor and blogs to several newspapers.

"I really enjoy talking to people about agriculture," she says. "There's no reason for people to be that uneducated about what they consume on a daily basis."

Reflecting on her college career, she

"definitely" believes it's vital for college students to stay involved with their industry.

"College campuses are a perfect place for people to advocate," she says. "The guys and girls who are on those campuses are tomorrow's soccer moms, and they are going to the beef counter. They're one of the most important generations to target because they are so impressionable."

Work with your state beef commission and cattlemen's association, Slater advises other young cattlemen. "They're great resources. If you want to get involved, they're more than willing to have you."

