

A Look At Th

Angus breeders explore beef production systems at Beef Leaders Institute.

Story & photos by *Shelia Stannard*

2008 BLI attendees:

John Dickinson, Sacramento, Calif.

Ben Lohmann, Eaton, Colo.

Tom Judy, Fremont, Iowa

Doug Steele, Anita, Iowa

T.J. Curtin, Blue Mound, Ill.

Jeff Dameron, Normal, Ill.

Harry Fisher, Aledo, Ill.

Alan Miller, Gridley, Ill.

Neal Haverkamp, Bern, Kan.

John McCurry, Burrton, Kan.

Dave Neely, Franklin, Ky.

Kenny Hinkle, Nevada, Mo.

Brad Arntzen, Hilger, Mont.

Chad Denowh, Sidney, Mont.

David Felumlee, Newark, Ohio

Alford Echols III, Cooper, Texas

Cheremie Viator, Franklin, Texas

Kevin Fleenor, Aldie, Va.

Tom McCall, Greenville, Va.

Young Angus breeders from across the country were given the opportunity to take an inside look into many segments of the beef industry this June during the first-ever Beef Leaders Institute (BLI). Nineteen American Angus Association members traveled more than 1,000 miles in three days to learn more about the Association, its programs and entities, and to tour packing plants, feedlots, and retail and wholesale distributors.

The BLI was designed to identify young, progressive Association members, ages 25-45, and to expose them to the entire beef production system while giving them greater insight into the Association. Participants were selected based on application, and the event was limited to a small group to more efficiently facilitate tours and discussion. The Angus Foundation helps to fund this event.

"BLI was a true once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about Angus operations across the country, but more importantly, BLI provided insight into segments outside of the cow-calf production end of our industry," Cheremie Viator, Franklin, Texas, says.

Seeing the entire beef production system was eye-opening for many of the participants who have been involved in seedstock operations their entire lives.

"BLI will allow me to make better breeding decisions to meet industry needs and consumer wants," Kevin Fleenor, Aldie, Va., says. "Also, it will allow me to better inform my customers of industry needs to make their operations more profitable."

Tours of the Association and Angus Productions Inc. (API) in Saint Joseph, Mo., kicked off the event. BLI participants visited one-on-one with Association employees to learn more about the Association and its entities — API, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) and the Angus Foundation. Tom Field, Colorado State University, challenged the group of young leaders before they loaded a bus to travel across Kansas.

Feeder, packer

Stops in southwest Kansas included an early morning tour of National Beef, Liberal, Kan. The group stopped at two diverse feeding operations — Grant County Feeders, Ulysses, Kan., and Triangle H Grain & Cattle Co., Garden City, Kan. Tom Brink, Five River Ranches Cattle Feeding, explained a typical breakeven and showed how limited factors can affect a feeder's bottom line.

T.J. Curtin, Blue Mound, Ill., appreciated hearing what feeders expect. "Listening to what kind and type of cattle the feedyard

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66



► Alford Echols III, Cooper, Texas, visits with Association Regional Manager David Gazda during a cookout the first night of the 2008 Beef Leaders Institute.

e Big Picture



► **Above:** Nineteen American Angus Association members traveled more than 1,000 miles in three days to learn more about the Association, its programs and entities, and to tour packing plants, feedlots, and retail and wholesale distributors.



► Gayla Fuston provided tours of the Association, allowing the group of young Association members to learn some of the history of the organization and its headquarters.



► Tom Field explains the needs and desires of the consumer to the group as Jeff Dameron looks on. Field had preassigned homework to the group, asking each person to buy a cut of beef from a grocery store, prepare it and eat it before completing a questionnaire.

A Look at The Big Picture CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64

managers liked to feed and what factors they considered when buying and selling cattle was beneficial to me,” he says.

Fleenor agrees that learning about the economics of the industry was important. “The most beneficial part was seeing firsthand the process of feeding and harvesting cattle. The amount of inputs it takes to get an animal from feedlot to meatcase was an eye-opening experience.”

Product distribution

After a bus ride back to the Kansas City area, the group toured various wholesale and retail outlets, including the Kansas City Steak Co., Sysco Food Services of Kansas City and Whole Foods Market. Tracy Thomas, director of marketing for U.S. Premium Beef (USPB), presented information to the group and stressed the importance of building relationships to succeed in the beef industry.

“I believe BLI will be the start of a unique network for each of the participants. Perhaps the strongest impact for each of us was the recognition of how many people contribute to and affect our end product — beef. From the production line workers at National Beef, to the managers at a foodservice distributor such as Sysco, to the marketing director at a Whole Foods, we gained a greater insight as to how their inputs directly impact our product,” Viator adds.

Alford Echols III, Cooper, Texas, says he left the BLI with a greater understanding of how his product affects the food chain.

“I have sold a few bulls since returning home. In two years, progeny from those bulls will be in feedlots, harvesting facilities and stores, and maybe even offered on TV,” Echols says. “I now have a better understanding of how my herd’s production is affecting the beef industry.”

Network

In addition to the tours and speakers, the group came together from diverse backgrounds and operations and had the opportunity to learn from one another during the bus ride, at the stops and during social opportunities.

“BLI can affect leaders in the future by networking,” Curtin says. “I met many new people in the three days we were there, and anytime you can get away from home for a while and see different styles of management, I think is always a good thing.”

Viator agrees, adding, “All too often, we look at our industry as having three segments — the producer, the feeder and the packer. The BLI trip really created an opportunity to see how much broader our industry really is. I believe every beef producer should travel the production system as we did!”

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► **Left, above:** Opportunities existed for the BLI participants to visit one-on-one with Association employees. Multi-generational Angus breeders T.J. Curtin (left) and Brad Arntzen (above) visit with Sharon Mayes and Tammy Poirier.



► Participants load the bus to continue the tour.

► Joel Jarnagin explains the feedmill at Grant County Feeders, Ulysses, Kan.



► **Left:** Participants used the bus time to visit with one another, network, play cards and return phone calls.

► **Below:** Kim Arseneaux, Certified Angus Beef LLC, and Kenny Hinkle take time to discuss the meatcase during a stop at Whole Foods Market in Overland Park, Kan.



► **Below:** Rebecca Miller, marketing manager for Whole Foods, showcases the beef case for the group during the consumer stop on the tour.



► **Above, below:** Chef John Landry prepared a smoked CAB prime rib for the group's lunch stop at Sysco, where he and Greg DeBoer sang praises for the product they sell regularly.



► **Sam Hands, owner of Triangle H, Garden City, Kan., discusses how he and his family have used Angus genetics when focusing on the quality aspect of beef production.**