

A New Perspective

Scott Buchanan trades his duties as a tour host on the Young Cattlemen's Conference for a chance to participate.

by *Crystal Albers*

Scott Buchanan is no stranger to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC). For eight years he has welcomed and educated YCC participants during their annual visit to Whitestone Farms — the Aldie, Va., Angus seedstock operation where he works as the show and sale cattle manager.

Each year, Buchanan takes great care in helping plan for and accommodate the group of approximately 50 cattlemen, and each year, he meets some of the industry's finest during their brief visit. But 2008 afforded the cattleman a different opportunity, and the shoe fit well on the other foot.

Well-rounded industry experience

Buchanan's interest in cattle began early. He grew up on a commercial cow-calf operation and was actively involved in 4-H and the National FFA Organization. He was hired by Whitestone after earning an animal science degree from Virginia Tech and also has his own herd of Angus and Angus-based cattle. The 30-year-old's interests in YCC were first sparked when he joined Whitestone.

"When you're just a stop on it, you only get to be with [YCC tour-goers] for three to four hours. When you're a participant, you get to be with that special group of people for eight days, and you really get to know them," he says. "Everybody who I have spoken to who has been associated with this conference had nothing but high regard for it. So it was something that I really wanted to experience, and it definitely didn't disappoint me."

Buchanan joined 50 other cattle producers, feeders, backgrounders and industry representatives May 29-June 5 on the 29th annual event, open to young leaders nominated by NCBA affiliates. The eight-day industry tour began at NCBA headquarters in Denver, Colo., where cattlemen got an in-depth look at the organization, met the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NCBA

► Scott Buchanan was the 2008 American Angus Association representative to NCBA's YCC. He says the experience provided a unique view of the entire cattle industry, from pasture to plate.

management team, and received checkoff updates and spokesperson training. Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding LLC presented an industry case study, and Cattle-Fax gave an industry outlook. The group also toured a retail store in Denver, where they learned about branded beef marketing efforts.

From Denver, Buchanan — the American Angus Association-sponsored candidate — and other YCC participants boarded chartered buses and traveled 300 miles to Grant County Feeders, a 112,000-head feedyard near Ulysses, Kan. Another 600-plus miles later, the group arrived at Tyson

Fresh Meats in South Sioux City, Neb., where they toured the company's newly expanded 5,000-head-per-day processing plant and an adjacent hide tannery.

The group then traveled to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) at the Chicago Board of Trade and The Bruss Co., a beef product fabrication facility.

With little sleep and lots of miles, tour-goers were later greeted at a John Deere-sponsored reception in Washington, D.C. The next day, the group received an issues briefing from NCBA's government relations

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staff and heard from the House Agriculture Committee.

Buchanan said hot topics throughout the conference centered on the skyrocketing cost of inputs and its relationship to ethanol and the U.S. corn supply.

"We had a case study where we worked in groups as well as an entire YCC class and discussed concerns with all inputs, but more specifically, corn," he says. "There was also a lot of discussion about COOL (country-of-origin labeling, sometimes also referred to as COL), what the protocol is going to be and how we are all going to make that happen by that September 30 date."

Animal identification (ID) was another issue that garnered the group's attention, Buchanan says. "A lot of people are looking at [national animal ID] in a negative fashion, but it's a changing world and we're going to need to change in order to remain competitive in the future," he adds.

Following the issues briefing, YCC participants then met with their respective state's Congressional leaders to discuss topics such as the Clean Water Act, energy policy and climate change.

For Buchanan, the opportunity to do so proved invaluable.

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— Scott Buchanan

"That was a real eye-opening experience. You realize how important it is and that our elected representatives want to hear from us. We need to make sure our voice is heard on issues that ultimately affect our livelihoods," he says.

The group was then able to travel to Buchanan's native Whitestone Farms to enjoy a tour and barbecue meal. There, Buchanan addressed the group, helped explain the role of a seedstock breeder and provided an open forum for discussion. American Angus Association President and Chairman of the Board Paul Hill addressed the crowd gathered at Whitestone, and Association Regional Manager David Mullins spoke.

"We don't necessarily push the Angus breed during the tour. We're just representing seedstock programs in terms of our role in the industry and giving them a tour of our facility and cattle and opening up for discussion how our particular program works and what we do," Buchanan says.

For some, the scenery alone served as a topic of discussion.

"Virginia is a very unique state in terms of our climate. There were a lot of people on this trip that had never been this far east. It was an eye-opening experience for them to see this many trees and this much green grass."

Back in Washington, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) representatives spoke with the group, giving an overview of the USDA and its role in trade, animal ID and the environment. New to this year's tour, Douglas Ross, special counsel for agriculture in the Antitrust Division from the U.S. Department of Justice gave an outlook on the JBS-Swift merger, and Jon Doggett of the National Corn Grower's Association (NCGA) met with the group.

The tour then came to an end at an

► Fifty-one cattle producers participated in the 29th annual YCC, a comprehensive nationwide tour that introduces young industry leaders to all facets of the cattle industry.



NCBA Political Action Committee (PAC) auction overlooking the Potomac River.

Commitment to cattlemen

Although fast-paced, the tour opened Buchanan's eyes to all segments of the cattle business.

"They (NCBA) do a great job of showing you the entire beef industry, from dealing with the media to the cow-calf producer to the feeder to the stock exchange, all the way to the legislative end of it in D.C.," Buchanan says. "We all too often worry about the particular niche market we're in, but you see firsthand every aspect of the entire business."

Meeting with NCBA's Washington, D.C., staff was one of the most interesting aspects of the tour, he adds.

"You get to see all the work they do in terms of lobbying congressmen and senators and see how they represent us on a daily basis," Buchanan says, complimenting the staff. "A lot of people don't really realize what they do for us, but we got to see that for two days."

In addition, Buchanan acquired a new appreciation for the beef checkoff.

"When you come back from this trip, you appreciate what the beef checkoff has done for the cattle industry," he says. "Just like any product, if you don't market it, the consumer won't buy it. The beef checkoff and everything that the cattlemen's association does for us is so important."

When he can, Buchanan now reminds fellow cattlemen to send in checkoff dollars. "I encourage all seedstock producers to make sure that they send checkoff money for all those private sales that they do on the farm. Every little dollar counts, and it certainly goes to a good cause."

A cause Buchanan says is well-achieved through NCBA programs.

"The cattlemen's association is so important for all of us in the beef industry, no matter what particular segment of the industry we are associated with, they really are concerned about our livelihoods and they're doing everything they can to make sure generations to come will be able to continue this way of life that we all love."

Buchanan encourages all Angus producers to consider membership in NCBA.

Back on the farm

At home in Aldie, Buchanan returns to his normal duties, but with a fresh outlook.



►**Left:** While on Capitol Hill, Buchanan and Virginia Cattlemen's Association representative Bill McDonald met with their state's Congressional leaders to discuss topics such as the Clean Water Act, energy policy and climate change. Buchanan says the opportunity was an eye-opening experience.

you see it from one end to the other, it's just overwhelming."

And through the trip, he now has a network of friends with whom he corresponds on a regular basis, each from a different location and background but all with the same overall goal in mind — securing a prosperous future for the cattle industry.

"The network of people would probably be one of the best things about the conference. We communicate now almost daily through e-mail on a listserv, and I think I truly made some friends that I'll have for a lifetime. If not for this opportunity, our paths may have never crossed.

"You make friendships and relationships with them that will encourage business in the future," he notes, adding, "This was one of the best conferences and tours I've ever been associated with."

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He says he now understands a broader beef industry scope and how it affects the typical American family.

"Consumers don't often understand why the cost of beef is increasing," he says. "They don't necessarily realize the time, labor and inputs required, but we're doing everything we can to make it as cheap, safe and reliable as possible. It's amazing how many people are involved in the beef industry. When

Interested in YCC?

Scott Buchanan, Aldie, Va., is not alone in his enthusiasm for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC). Like past American Angus Association representatives, Buchanan says the eight-day event offered him experiences like no other.

"I know it takes a lot of time out of people's busy summer schedules, but the volume of information you take home from this tour is so unique," he says. "You get to meet so many industry-leading people and actually put a face with a name. The connections you make are just unbelievable. This is something you definitely, definitely need to be involved with if you have an interest in being in the cattle business for a lifetime."

Buchanan enthusiastically encourages others to apply to the Angus Foundation for sponsorship. The not-for-profit organization began sponsoring a representative of the Angus breed to YCC in 2003.

Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president, says the Angus Foundation usually receives about half a dozen applications annually. He says the YCC helps Angus breeders better understand the complexity of issues and challenges the beef industry faces.

"One of three programmatic areas of emphasis of the Angus Foundation's mission is education, and YCC provides us a wonderful avenue to help educate Angus breeders about the beef industry and its numerous facets from production all the way to the consumer," Jenkins says. "Our number of YCC participants continues to expand, and this investment will pay dividends for the Angus breed and beef industry many years into the future."

Interested individuals in the 2009 YCC have until Monday, Jan. 5, 2009, to submit applications to the Angus Foundation by the postmark deadline. Applications can be downloaded from the Angus Foundation's web site beginning Dec. 1, 2008.

