

The Best of Both Worlds

Having grown up with beef backgrounds, these two women are thrilled to now be raising their own families in the industry while also working to serve beef producers.

by Kindra Gordon

Managing both a career and family can often be a difficult balancing act — but it can also have great rewards. This year for the *Angus Journal's* annual spotlight on rural women we feature two women who are dedicated to raising their families with strong ties to agriculture, while also being passionate about their careers to serve the industry's beef producers.

Julie Schaff Ellingson has been the communications director with the North Dakota Stockmen's Association (NDSA) for the last 12 years. She and her husband, Chad, who is a beef sire procurement manager for Genex/CRI, also own and manage a registered Angus herd near Saint Anthony, N.D. They are the parents of five children, ranging in age from 3 months to 10 years old.

Ann Marie Bosshamer has worked with the Nebraska Beef Council for 11 years and currently serves as executive director. Her husband, Brian, is an Extension educator in Nebraska's Buffalo County, and they have a 2-year-old daughter. They also operate an Angus-based commercial cow-calf operation near Amherst, Neb., with Brian's parents.

Beef beginnings

Both Ellingson and Bosshamer attribute their passion for the beef industry to their own upbringings with cattle. Bosshamer grew up on a family feedlot operation in Nebraska and was an active 4-Her. Ellingson grew up in the Schaff Angus seedstock operation and was active in 4-H, FFA and junior Angus activities.

From working on the family ranch, Ellingson says, "I learned responsibility and the importance of taking care of the land. I saw how much my parents enjoyed what they did and raising their family in the ranch lifestyle, and I wanted that for my own family someday."

But, in addition to family, these two ladies also knew they wanted to pursue beef industry careers. Bosshamer says, "I always knew I wanted to be involved in the beef industry in a promotional way, I just wasn't sure how I'd get there."

After graduating with a diversified ag degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and working for a short time with Extension, the pieces came together, and her dream of "beef promotion" was realized when she landed a position with the Nebraska Beef Council. Bosshamer started as director of consumer affairs, working in nutrition and education. She eventually moved into the marketing and retail-service side and today serves as executive director of her state's council.

Given her own family roots in the beef industry, Bosshamer says her role is very meaningful to her. "I do this job for the producers like my dad, who is in his 80s and is still feeding cattle everyday; for my brother, who came back to the family operation; and for my father-in-law, who is a cow-calf producer," she says. "I recognize the ability I have to be on the front lines for people like that; I feel I can use my talents to speak up on their behalf within the industry."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIE SCHAFF ELLINGSON

► Julie Schaff Ellingson has been the North Dakota Stockmen's Association communications director for the last 12 years. She also works on the family's Saint Anthony, N.D., ranch with her husband, Chad, and five children.

Likewise, Ellingson says her background in beef and interest in communications fueled her desire to be an advocate for the beef industry. She too was uncertain what that job might be, but shortly after graduating from North Dakota State University (NDSU) with a mass communications degree, the communications position with the NDSA came open, and Ellingson found her “dream job.”

“It had all the components I enjoy — public speaking, writing and putting the magazine together, and most importantly working with producers and being their voice.” Today, in addition to her communications duties for members, Ellingson assists with lobbying for NDSA members at the state capital.

Reaping the rewards

Given their dedication to the industry, it’s no surprise that both of these women have achieved success in their dual roles of career and family. For Bosshamer, a highlight during her tenure has been the development of the now popular flat-iron steak. It was developed along with several new value-added beef cuts a few years back through checkoff-funded research primarily conducted by UNL’s Chris Calkins and fellow meat scientists in an effort to add value to the chuck and the round. Development of the flat-iron steak has helped build beef demand through its popularity at restaurants and retail.

Of the outcome, Bosshamer says, “That research has made a significant impact on our industry, and we (the Beef Council) are very proud to have played a role in that contribution.”

Ellingson has earned recognition for her work on developing *The North Dakota Stockman* magazine

into a respected publication. Under her leadership, the magazine has been recognized by the National Federation of Press Women and was awarded the Livestock Publication Council (LPC) James Flanagan Award, which recognizes the most improved livestock publication in its annual communications contest. In 2007, the North Dakota FFA Foundation nominated Ellingson to receive the Honorary American FFA Degree on the national level.

While such accolades are appreciated, Ellingson says her biggest accomplishment is her five children. “I’m proud of the people they are becoming. That takes the cake over any plaque or award. ... You can’t beat



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANN MARIE BOSSHAMER

► Ann Marie Bosshamer serves as the executive director of the Nebraska Beef Council. Also a mother, Ann assists with the family’s cow-calf operation near Amherst, Neb.

being able to raise your family in a rural environment. It’s a wonderful blessing,” she says.

Ellingson admits that finding a balance among ranch work, family and career demands can be tricky, but she has found that time management, being flexible and surrounding yourself with a good support network can help make it all possible. “We are fortunate to have my parents and Chad’s parents help with the kids and ranch work from time to time, as do neighbors and friends,” she says.

She adds it is a fulfilling life, saying, “Even though you may get tired, doing something you love gives you joy at the end of the day.”

Additionally, Bosshamer recognizes it is a lifestyle full of lessons. For her own daughter she says, “I do want her to grow up in

agriculture and learn the work ethic of being responsible for animals, crops and the land — those things are a good foundation for any career.”

Advice for others

These working moms agree that the best advice they can offer to other young people seeking a successful future — and the path they will direct their own children on — is to get involved in youth activities.

Ellingson says her participation in 4-H, FFA, speech and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) all helped her develop life skills that she uses today. “Those life skills, friendships and contacts from participating

in extracurricular activities will be with you all through your life,” she says.

Ellingson emphasizes the importance of internships and being involved with industry organizations. “Doing these things helps you understand the issues facing the industry and helps you meet people working in your field. It also ensures that you are ready for that first job,” she says.

Bosshamer adds, “One of the best things I did was have an internship. Even though I didn’t end up working for that company, it was an important stepping-stone. Internships give you a good foundation and make you more marketable.”

Both women also point out the abundance of opportunities in agriculture.

“There’s a bright future for agriculture,” Bosshamer says. “There are so many opportunities in our industry, and it doesn’t have to be a traditional ag degree.”

Ellingson echoes that sentiment. “There is a way to tie your ag interests to just about any career, from nutrition to science to communications,” she says. “The people working in agriculture feed the world and contribute to society in a wonderful way.”

More work to do

Looking ahead, Bosshamer and Ellingson are excited about the future of the beef industry and their role in it. Bosshamer believes the beef industry’s success will lie in more development of new beef products, as well as keeping beef front and center as part of a healthy diet with consumers through efforts with menu and retail promotions and as part of the Food Guide Pyramid.

Additionally, she says her Beef Council staff will focus on serving producers through education and communication, as well as continually informing the industry about checkoff benefits and how the money is used.

Similarly, Ellingson says NDSA is always striving to enhance services and communication to members. She hopes to offer more web and online member services in the future. And, she sees increasing emphasis on the NDSA’s role of being a watchdog over government and environmental issues and regulations. “Our aim is to provide good leadership and be a strong voice so our producers can carry out ranch operations,” she says.

Bosshamer sums up her feelings on giving back to the beef industry this way: “It really is an honor for me to work for this industry and its great people. Our staff team works hard every day to strengthen beef demand in the global marketplace. I believe it is important to be part of something larger than ourselves — and that’s the beef industry.”

