

Young and Relentless

A new breed of leaders emerge to guide Angus into the future.

by Boyd Kidwell

These are exciting times to be Angus producers, especially for young leaders building a cattle breed based on a sound foundation.

The young people featured in this article weren't selected through competition, and they aren't being spotlighted for achievements. Instead, these producers represent a new generation of Angus leaders with dreams to pursue and obstacles to overcome.

Here's how young leaders are using a solid Angus foundation as a springboard to propel a dynamic breed forward.

Starting from scratch

Larry Coleman launched Coleman Angus in Charlo, Mont., basically from scratch. Coleman started his operation after buying a piece of land with the proceeds from a prize-winning show steer. He used the prize money as a down payment on 80 acres of pasture and has since pursued his goal of raising top-quality cattle. Coleman Angus is relatively small in size at 400 acres, but the operation sells 150 purebred animals a year.

"One of the great problems in agriculture is the amount of capital it takes to get established in the cattle business," Coleman says. "That's why there aren't too many young people in ranching. We live in a beautiful part of Montana with mountains and streams. Because of the natural beauty, people are moving to this area, and the value of land makes it hard to raise cattle."

The 34-year-old Coleman got into the Angus business by traveling a slightly different path from most breeders. His family raised another breed of cattle. After getting married, Coleman and his wife, Dee, went to work for a registered Angus outfit. Calving out 700 cows with minimal assistance helped him realize the value of Angus females.

"I think that's why today I'm so strict on the females. I'm always thinking about the mother cow when I make matings. What are the daughters of these matings going to be like? I'm very strict on feet, legs, udder quality and longevity in our females," Coleman says.

Coleman and Dee started Coleman Angus with only a few cows, but they were top-quality Angus females. When he told his banker how much money he needed to buy four cows, the banker thought he'd lost his mind. To get the most out of his relatively small acreage, Coleman uses artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET). He leases commercial cows from cooperating ranchers to carry embryos.

"It makes more sense from an economical standpoint for us to work with commercial operations to get these embryo calves," Coleman says.

Coleman Angus is still relatively small as ranching operations go. But Coleman and Dee are finding success with their female and bull sales.

"A small breeder can be competitive because we're actually in the people business," Coleman says. "I think one of the biggest keys in our

business is to make sure we have a product that we believe in and will stand behind. Customer service is a big part of our business. Actually, being a smaller operation helps us because we're able to spend more time with our customers. It's important to us that they are happy and that our cattle are doing what they are bred to do. We're proof that there's still a place for the little guy."

Happy camper

For a young person who loves cattle, Cheramie Viator has the best of two worlds. She works for a leading Angus operation — Camp Cooley Ranch of Franklin, Texas — and she's building a small cattle ranch of her own.

"It's quite simple for me; I have a strong passion for the beef industry and the way of life ranching incorporates across the country. Also, I enjoy the cross section of people and personalities that are part of our industry," the 36-year-old Viator says.

In her position with Camp Cooley, Viator is expanding her international contacts and her knowledge of beef marketing. Her personal goals include developing the ranch where she raises Angus, Brangus and Red Brangus cattle. In the future, Viator also wants to get married so she can "raise good kids and good cattle." Since the right man hasn't come along, the cows presently receive most of her attention.

On a more serious note, Viator wants to serve as a spokesperson for the beef industry. There are two major areas that beef producers need to improve when presenting a positive message about the cattle business, she points out.

"It is vital that we reach out to young consumers in metropolitan areas to gain and keep their confidence in our beef product. These young folks are our future customers and will be an important constituency," Viator says.

With her experience as a Congressional liaison for a U.S. Congressman, Viator says effective and consistent communication between the cattle industry and government leaders is also extremely important.

"We should send a united message to these leaders about the needs of our industry," Viator says.

Viator gives the American Angus Association a great deal of the credit for helping her get off to a successful start in the cattle business.

"The American Angus Association has been an incredible source of information and support to me, individually as an Angus breeder and to Camp Cooley Ranch, my employer. As a breed association, the data provided is second to none, and the regional managers are very resourceful," she adds.

Viator says she appreciates the help she received through the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). The money spent on junior Angus activities, she says, is a tremendous investment in the future for beef producers. If these juniors don't become ranchers, they



CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

Young and Relentless CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64

usually settle down in metropolitan areas and remain lifelong supporters of beef.

From her viewpoints of working for a large operation and as a small rancher, Viator has a couple of observations for Angus producers to consider.

Production costs (fuel and corn) have become the top limiting factors in cattle production, and she says these factors will drive not only the phenotype and genotype of cattle produced, but they will also influence production practices.

"We in the Angus breed have a tendency to follow trends without thinking of the long-term effects on our cattle efficiency. As natural resources become more difficult to obtain, we will be challenged to propagate cattle that are more profit-oriented," the young leader says.

Back to the ranch

After a stint working with the American Angus Association, Matt Perrier returned to his family's Dalebanks Angus operation near Eureka, Kan. Perrier felt a strong attraction back to the 100-year-old homestead. He and his wife, Amy, also felt the ranch would be a perfect place to raise their two young children.

"The more I traveled with the Angus Association, the more I realized that rural America needs young people to come back and produce food for our country," Perrier says.

While returning to an established ranching operation seems like the ideal lifestyle for a young family, there are obstacles to face. First of all, there's often an inconsistent or limited cash flow. Perrier candidly admits that family businesses — especially farms and ranches — present communication challenges when various family members and generations are involved. As an example, he wants to use new technology even more in the cattle breeding operation.

"My father is still the boss, but I'm fortunate that Mom and Dad have always been willing to consider new technology. They were among the first to collect production records and submit them to AHIR (Angus Herd Improvement Records). They have used AI and embryo transfer for years," the young producer says.

And then there's time spent communicating by phone and e-mail. "I

tend to spend a little more of my day on the telephone finding out what our customers need. Maybe it's just laziness, but I think it's a priority to communicate with our commercial producers," Perrier says.

Listening to commercial customers may be a key tool for other seedstock providers. Perrier points out that Angus breeders spend a lot of time talking with other Angus breeders. However, he strongly believes that commercial producers have input that purebred breeders need to hear.

With a new perspective as a rancher, Perrier says he is concerned a sense of complacency among Association members could spell trouble down the road.

"I'm a little concerned with the passive nature we're taking on," he explains. "I'm concerned that we've lost some of the edge and aggressiveness of the past. Maybe we aren't as hungry. Twenty years ago, the Angus breed was having some troubles and the leaders came up with innovative solutions like open AI, AHIR and Certified Angus Beef. I'm not sure our membership is taking bold steps like those today."

Black gold

After graduating from college, Ty Byrd returned to the family ranching operation of Byrd Cattle Co., near Red Bluff, Calif. Ty and his father, Dan, run the operation along with their respective wives, Gina and Chris.

"Our bread and butter is selling bulls to commercial producers. Our biggest obstacle is expanding in the traditional way to make the ranch support two families," Ty says.

Byrd Cattle Co. is located in a rapidly developing area of northern California. Land prices there have increased to the point that cattle producers can't easily expand pastureland. To increase production, the Byrds transfer embryos from their high-value Angus cows to recipient cows in cooperating herds from surrounding states. They now transfer 250-300 embryos annually. In the past six years, they've increased annual sales from 35 bulls to 100 bulls in 2006.

The Byrds offer several innovative programs to their customers. "Anytime we visit with our customers, we talk to them about ways to add value to their calves. AngusSource® has been very beneficial in increasing the price our customers receive for their commercial calves sired by our bulls," says Ty, who reports customers have seen an \$8 [per hundredweight (cwt.)] to \$10 marketing advantage for calves enrolled in AngusSource.

To encourage customers to capture this increased value, the Byrds pay half of the AngusSource enrollment fee for bull customers.

"We're not just in the cattle business, but the customer service business as well. Thus, we'll do just about anything to help our customers capture value," Ty says.

The Byrds help new Angus breeders break into the business by allowing purebred customers to sell bulls out of cows purchased from Byrd Cattle Co. through its sales. With more than 3,000

Angus assistance

► **Outreach Seminars.** These state meetings include an American Angus Association update, a presentation on the Association's performance programs, coverage of current research projects and information on commercial programs. View a recent Outreach Seminar at Kearney, Neb., at www.angus.org and click on the Angus Education Center.

► **Cattlemen's Boot Camps.** In an effort to further educate producers about the beef industry, Cattlemen's Boot Camps are designed for smaller groups to see and hear about production, management and marketing. A limited number of new producers also attend Angus Skill Labs that provide hands-on training for artificial insemination (AI), freeze-branding, tattooing and other management practices.

► **Webcasts.** To provide even more information for producers with internet access, the Association has set up webcasts covering such topics as AAA Login, AHIR Basics, AngusSource® and AHIR Yearling Information. Webcasts may also be found at www.angus.org in the Angus Education Center.

► **Bull Listing Service (BLS).** Angus breeders can advertise registered Angus sires at a reasonable cost. The service is free for buyers, and they can search for bulls by expected progeny differences (EPDs), sire groups or location by state.

► **AngusSource.** This is your online source of information about Angus-sired cattle for sale nationwide. AngusSource is the only program that identifies Angus-sired cattle and documents the source, genetic and group age information of enrolled cattle. AngusSource is a Process Verified Program (PVP) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 68

Young and Relentless CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66

Angus bulls sold in California annually, marketing is a major challenge for new breeders.

“We basically allow our purebred customers access to our established commercial market,” Ty says.

When possible, Ty and Dan participate in programs offered by the American Angus Association. Dan recently attended one of the first Cattleman’s Boot Camps sponsored by the Association and the Angus Foundation at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The Boot Camp featured national leaders in the beef industry as they helped cattle producers learn to be more efficient in the rapidly changing beef industry.

On the subject of efficiency, Ty does most of the office work for Byrd Cattle Co. After experiencing problems submitting online weights and registrations with another breed association, he appreciates the American Angus Association’s well-organized computer system and user-friendly web site.

One highlight for the Byrd family has been hosting a stop when the National Angus Tour traveled through California. When possible, the Byrds take advantage of opportunities to visit with other Angus folks.

“Any time the Angus Association does a seminar in California, we try to attend,” Ty says.

A legacy lives on

As a fourth-generation Angus breeder and owner of one of the largest seedstock nurseries in the country, Kelly Schaff of Schaff’s Angus Valley has grabbed the ball and is running hard with it.

In 2006, he and his wife, Martie Jo (along with daughters Kelsie and Kourtney), hosted one of the highest-grossing Angus bull sales in the history of the breed. Schaff’s Angus Valley sold 500 bulls averaging \$6,251 per head. Schaff tries to stay modest about his success as a purebred breeder, but he can’t hide his enthusiasm for the business and his passion for top-quality Angus cattle. Throughout the years, Schaff’s Angus Valley has affected the Angus breed with multiple herd sires going to purebred farms and major AI studs.

Schaff attributes some of his success to learning all aspects of the Angus business while growing up. “I was born into the Angus business and I’ve worked with it ever since I was presented with many responsibilities of the registered cattle operation at a very young age,” Schaff says. “I eat, sleep and breathe Angus cattle. To me, the real reward is working with a great breed of cattle and the people in the beef industry.”

Even though he was born into the Angus business, Schaff points out that he faces a major obstacle common to many other young leaders — the huge amount of capital required to take over a seedstock business.

Schaff’s advice to young people starting in the Angus business is to align with a well-established breeder who is willing to invest time to help guide their developing program.

“I would encourage someone starting out to select seedstock with a uniform base and breeding direction. This will shorten your path to success,” Schaff says.

Schaff recognizes the American Angus Association and its Board of Directors for the outstanding work they do in promoting the Angus breed. He points out that the AHIR program has been a valuable tool since its inception. He also commends the Association for resisting the temptation to become “bigger” by processing data on crossbred cattle. “The integrity of the Angus database and the loyalty to the Angus breed and Angus breeders can’t be compromised at any price,” Schaff states.

For the future, Schaff will continue delivering quality and service to customers. His focus remains on cutting-edge genetics that he

believes will continue the legacy of Schaff’s Angus Valley.

“There’s no shortage of Angus cattle these days, but there’s always demand for high-quality Angus,” Schaff says. “I believe there’s more potential for profit to be made on the top 20% of all Angus cattle than on the other 80%.”

Happy on the homestead

Dru Uden attended college and spent a year working at another ranch before returning to his family’s TC Ranch at Franklin, Neb. Dru’s parents, Vance and Connie, have a herd of 700 cows and heifers along with crops on the 7,000-acre TC Ranch. Returning home and raising Angus cattle had been Dru’s plan all along.

“For me, ranching and raising Angus have been things I wanted to do all my life. I’m glad I went to college and had a year’s work experience on another ranch. They did things a little differently than us, and I learned more about marketing females,” Dru says.

But selling Angus bulls is the meat and potatoes of TC Ranch. Dru and Vance sell 300-320 bulls a year. Like other young leaders, Dru would like to expand, but available land is a limiting factor.

“Around here, land tends to stay in the family. If land does come available, it’s expensive. I’d like to expand, but we’ll play it by ear. Ideally, I’d like to get up to marketing 500 bulls a year, but that may be optimistic,” the 31-year-old rancher says.

Since Dru has come back, TC Ranch has expanded its ET program by using commercial cows at other ranches. Dru and Vance have also increased semen sales. Dru makes it a point to gain as much customer input as possible.

“I work a lot on marketing and spend time talking with customers,” he points out.

Dru also finds time to enjoy the cattle business away from the ranch. Last summer he helped judge Angus and four other breeds at the Missouri State Fair. For both fun and business purposes, Dru also attends Angus sales in other states. Last year, Vance attended the National Angus Conference and Tour in Idaho and Oregon.

Although Dru’s responsibility to keep the ranch running impedes his ability to get to many meetings, he finds time to attend the American Angus Association’s Annual Meeting in Louisville, Ky. The trip offers a great chance to talk about genetics with other Angus producers and to keep up with the latest developments for the breed.

If there’s anything to be changed, Dru would like to see the AngusSource program somehow strengthened.

“I like AngusSource, and it’s a good program, but it’s not catching on in our area. We’ve offered cost-share to encourage producers to enroll cattle, but no one takes us up on it. Producers are waiting to see what the final regulations are for animal identification (ID), but I’d like to somehow see increased participation,” he points out.

For the long term, Dru’s main goal is to keep TC Ranch running in tip-top shape for the next generation.

“I’ve got two kids, and one day I’d like to see them take over this business,” he says.

Giving back to Angus

Veterinarian Brent Scarlett gives the cattle business, and specifically Angus cattle, much of the credit for helping him forge a rewarding career as a large animal veterinarian. In recognition of his dedication and ability, Scarlett was honored as North Carolina’s Young Veterinarian of the Year in 2005.

“When you work with cattle every day, it teaches you responsibility and concern for animals. Working with Angus show calves gave me a passion for the cattle business,” says the large animal veterinarian from Snow Camp, N.C.

Brent and his father, Jim, own a herd of 60 registered Angus cows. The Scarletts are now devoting time to helping young people gain valuable life lessons from caring for show calves. Brent and Jim work with local kids to help them show calves from the Scarletts' registered Angus herd. The father-son team also tries to locate potential show calves for kids without access to cattle.

"One of my concerns is that the North Carolina Junior Angus Association maintains a good group of young members," Brent says. "We have a great group this year, but it's getting harder to find young people to get involved. We're losing small family farms right and left in North Carolina, and eventually this loss of farms could lower our numbers of young people interested in the cattle business."

One of Brent's suggestions is to help children from urban backgrounds learn about beef cattle through showing calves. He says this effort could pay long-term dividends for the beef business. He also suggests that Angus producers around the country could play a role in this kind of effort.

"So many people today don't know what it takes to put a steak on the plate and vegetables on the table," Brent says.

Girls' ranch

Cara and Tom Ayres own Ayres Angus of Stevensville, Mont. Tom stays busy with his job as manager of nearby Wheelbarrow Creek Ranch. Cara has her hands full parenting 4-year-old daughter Jonwyn and managing the herd of registered Angus cows (or "the girls," as the Ayres call them). Cara (formerly Pascalar) also maintains an active cattle show judging schedule.

"I feel as if my entire life has been an education to pursue the

business of raising great Angus cattle. Other than parenting my daughter Jonwyn, nothing challenges me more, continually hones my skill sets, or gives me the joy that managing my herd of registered Angus cattle does," Cara says.

The devoted Angus breeder is quick to give much of the credit for her success to the American Angus Association, saying it has been behind her in the following ways:

- ▶ Local and state associations supported her activities as a youngster.
- ▶ Auxiliaries made scholarships available so that she didn't need to sell all of her cows to pay her way through graduate school.
- ▶ The NJAA helped mold her into a better leader.
- ▶ As a breeder, she's found professionalism and courtesy from field representatives and staff.

Ayres Angus has marketed as a guest consignor with Holiday Ranch for the past two years, selling top females. But Cara and Tom hope to someday have an Ayres Angus bull sale. The Ayres are also trying their first partnership by implanting embryos in a co-op herd. Working with a cooperating herd on embryo transfer should give them a chance to market more cattle without increasing inputs on the home ranch.

Time management is the biggest challenge Cara and Tom face. The young couple constantly brainstorms about ways of widening the ranch's profit margin, and once Jonwyn is in school full time, Cara plans to devote more time to sales and marketing.

"On the other hand, time is on our side. We're young to have such an accomplished herd, and we're realizing a lifelong dream by creating something worth value to the industry," Cara says.

