

First-generation

BLI graduates choose to give back to the Angus Foundation.

by *Carrie Horsley, Angus Foundation, and Linda Robbins, assistant editor*

First-generation farmers and ranchers want to learn everything they can to make their operations successful. They can turn to extension specialists in their areas of the country and to other educational opportunities in the industry, but the Beef Leaders Institute (BLI), funded by the Angus Foundation, is the only educational opportunity extended to American Angus Association members ages 25 to 45 that gives them a firsthand look at Association services and a bigger picture of the beef industry as a whole.

First-generation leader

Danny Poss, Scotia, Neb., a 2013 BLI graduate, is a first-generation Angus breeder, and, after his BLI experience, a first-time contributor to the Angus Foundation. Poss says learning what the Angus Foundation offers spurred him to join in the effort to advance research and the Angus breed.

Poss says the experience enhanced his leadership skills.

“You get to teach commercial cattlemen about new technology and other parts of the industry, whether at a packing plant like Tyson or the ready-to-eat meat at Cargill,” Poss explains. “You are more knowledgeable in the beef industry and can pass those things on to commercial cattlemen you work with on a daily basis.”

His experience opened his eyes to how much value is added to the beef product after it leaves the farm. Poss cites the ready-to-eat products showcased at Cargill as a good example. After seeing the impact of the added value of the product after it leaves the trailer, it helped him set new goals and gave him greater determination.

Besides furthering his leadership skills, Poss says BLI helped him meet new friends and network.

“You meet new people to network with in all aspects of the industry,” Poss says. “You gain networking friends and people at the Association you can call and rely on.”

Poss was appreciative of the tour of the Association and the chance to see all the different work that goes on at Angus headquarters.



PHOTO BY LYNSEY MEHARG



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE POSS FAMILY

► **Above:** Danny Poss, Scotia, Neb., (standing on the right at the back in plaid shirt) watches a demonstration at Sysco during the 2013 BLI.

► **Left:** Poss and sons Nolan and Nathan pose with Poss Total Impact 745. He says his BLI experience opened his eyes to how much value is added to the beef product after it leaves the farm; Poss cites ready-to-eat products as a good example.

“BLI helped me see that my success depends on the success of my customers — i.e., the feedlot operators, packers, retailers and, ultimately, the consumer.”

— *Byron Tuckwiller*

“Each department was able to tell us all about what they do, show us how they do their jobs and how they help breeders,” he adds. “It was great to be able to actually meet the people you talk to on the phone.”

Family legacy

Justin Spickler, Glenfield, N.D., a 2010 BLI graduate, ranches with his wife, Sara; his brother Nathan; and sister-in-law Emily. He says BLI opened his eyes to all of the work the Foundation does regarding research and scholarships.

“We are the first generation to give,”

Spickler says of starting their own legacy by being his family’s first generation to donate to the Angus Foundation. He says they probably would have eventually given, but it would have taken longer to decide if it hadn’t been for BLI. Spickler says they originally targeted their donations to scholarships, but more recent donations have not been targeted.

One of the things they do, Spickler says, is work at customer satisfaction.

“We make an effort to stand behind our product [to] foster a good relationship,” he adds. They follow up in December with their bull customers to make sure the newly purchased bulls are working. It was a big turning point for them, Spickler says, to initiate personal contact and stand behind their product the way they do.

A post-BLI change they made in their operation was in the area of genomic enhancements in expected progeny differences (EPDs). Spickler says he realized whether they took part in DNA testing or not, it was going to be a large part of the cattle industry. They now test a part of their elite bulls to confirm the benefit of using them in their program. The reasons for testing weren’t

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just to get the genomic information, but to help them continue to improve their herd.

Spickler says the opportunity to get to know the Association staff on a more personal level and be able to talk to them in a casual and conversational way was wonderful.

Supporting the vision

A member of the 2009 BLI group, Byron Tuckwiller, Triple T Angus, Lewisburg, W.Va., says he gained insight into the good work the Angus Foundation is doing. BLI enabled Tuckwiller to see how the Angus Foundation used the money. Before, he hadn't grasped the concept of where the money was going and who was benefiting from it. He adds that other family members have attended additional Foundation-supported events and have all had positive experiences.

Tuckwiller was motivated to give to the Foundation so he could support the vision early contributors had when they gave. Though his family had not contributed in the past, Tuckwiller says, "I'm glad I can participate, giving what I can when I can." He especially wants his contributions to help educate the next generation.

Tuckwiller says he is reminded daily of his BLI experience when he remembers how impressed he was when David Trowbridge of Gregory Feedlots said, "I can mess up good



PHOTO BY SHEILA STANNARD



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD GRIST

► **Above:** During the 2009 BLI, the group visited the library at the American Angus Association. Byron Tuckwiller, Lewisburg, W.Va., is pictured on the left.

► **Left:** Tuckwiller says Triple T Angus breeds approximately 250 cows and 32 heifers per year, and farms about 1,250 acres of owned ground and 400 acres of leased ground. Tuckwiller says his BLI experience turned out to be much more than he ever expected it to be.

genetics 100 ways, but I can't do much with bad genetics."

"It made me realize that a satisfied customer begins with me," Tuckwiller says. "BLI helped me see that my success depends

on the success of my customers — i.e., the feedlot operators, packers, retailers and, ultimately, the consumer."

Tuckwiller enjoys the annual alumni meeting of BLI attendees because he is able to make more connections with others from different trips, and he gets to hear about their different experiences. He says BLI turned out to be much more than he ever expected it to be.

"Visiting these operations gave me valuable insight into the different facets of our industry," Tuckwiller says. "I feel that it is important to provide these opportunities to other breeders. By supporting the Foundation, I can help make this a possibility."



PHOTO BY SHEILA STANNARD

► **Above:** Justin Spickler, Glenfield, N.D., pictured above with the 2009 BLI group, says the opportunity to get to know the Association staff on a more personal level and be able to talk to them in a casual and conversational way was wonderful.

► **Right:** Pictured are the next generation of Spickler ranchers: the children of Justin and Sara Spickler and Nathan and Emily Spickler.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SPICKLER FAMILY

Alumni lunch

All BLI graduates will meet again at the Alumni Lunch, an invitation-only event scheduled for Nov. 4 in the Missouri Ballroom of the Holiday Inn during the Angus Means Business Convention & Trade Show.



Editor's Note: Carrie Horsley is the director of marketing and public relations for the Angus Foundation.