



# Driving the Future

*The American Angus Auxiliary awards scholarships to 10 young Angus enthusiasts.*

by Jenna Whitaker, editorial intern

This July National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members were Moovin' Down Route 66 to Tulsa, Okla., for the National Junior Angus Show (Njas). While the event recognized standouts in the industry, ten juniors were highlighted for their dedication to driving the industry forward as they were named recipients for the American Angus Auxiliary's scholarships.

For more than 50 years, the American Angus Auxiliary has recognized these outstanding junior members with the American Angus Auxiliary Scholarship. The Auxiliary has awarded thousands of dollars in scholarships to this year's standout NJAA members.

Five female and five male recipients are chosen and ranked, with the scholarship pool divided amongst them based on their individual placings. Individuals must be nominated for recognition by their state or regional association the spring preceding their freshman year of college.

Five cattlewomen are also selected by the Auxiliary during this application process to be entered into the race for the title of Miss American Angus. The newest woman to wear the red coat will be crowned at the annual Angus Convention in November.

The contestants for the 2024-2025 Miss American Angus title Clara Henderson, East Troy, Wis.; Cheyenne Houk, Blakesburg, Iowa;

Claire Murnin, Pompeys Pillar, Mont.; Adelaide Haverkamp, Bern, Kan.; and Payton Alexander, Nemo, Texas.

## ★ PAYTON ALEXANDER ★

*Hometown: Nemo, Texas*

*Parents: Michael and Margaret Alexander*

*High School: Glen Rose High School*

*College: Sam Houston State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 10 years*



Payton Alexander attributes the confidence to chase her goals and ambitions to an early involvement with *The Business Breed*. The Texas junior didn't know what that looked like at first, but she jumped headfirst into any opportunity. That's how Alexander found herself serving as a director for her state association at just 8 years old.

"Over the years, I have actively sought out ways to build my leadership skills by participating in various organizations and embracing every opportunity to grow," Alexander says. "I believe leadership is about more than just titles; it is about taking initiative, setting an example and sharing knowledge so that others, too, can become great leaders."

She says a life growing up in the cattle industry has also taught her the importance of professionalism, work ethic and honesty. Watching

her parents embody these virtues reinforced the value these soft skills carry into work, relationships and life.

Alexander believes one of the biggest issues facing the cattle industry today is a decline in young people entering the industry.

"Today, the average age of a U.S. farmer is over 57 years old," she emphasizes. "Without younger producers stepping in, the future of the beef industry is at risk."

That's why Alexander wants to do her part and help decrease that number. She plans to attend Sam Houston State University to study animal science and agricultural business, after which she hopes to secure a job working alongside cattle ranchers to develop optimized feed rations. Alexander says she knows these are high aspirations, but she is confident her involvement in the Angus community has prepared her for this next step.

"Through this breed, I have had the privilege of meeting individuals who have positively influenced me, challenged me to push my limits and helped me understand the opportunities within the industry," she says.

The Auxiliary offers a \$2,100 scholarship to help her achieve those goals.

## ★ CAILEE FLOOD ★

*Hometown: Oakdale, Calif.*

*Parents: Brian and Tamara Flood*

*High School: Oakdale High School*

*College: Kansas State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 4 years*



Golden State native Cailee Flood is thankful for all the opportunities a life rooted in the cattle industry has

provided, citing patience and commitment as key values that have been instilled in her throughout the years.

She's only been a part of the NJAA for four years, but Flood has wasted no time getting involved. She is serving as the 2025 Angus queen and vice president for the California Angus Association. These roles allow her a platform to do something she's truly passionate about — advocate for the industry.

In Flood's opinion, the biggest issue facing the beef industry is a growing disconnect between producers and consumers. She says this disconnect is leading to a lack of knowledge about the industry and allowing misinformation to spread.

"As a young Angus breeder, I believe it's crucial that we bridge this gap through transparency, education and storytelling," Flood shares. "It's up to us to show that today's cattlemen and women are committed to raising high-quality beef in ways that are responsible, ethical and rooted in family tradition."

Her career aspirations align with her desire to protect and advocate for the agricultural industry. Flood intends to receive a degree in agricultural business with a prelaw focus. She says her ultimate ambition is to become an agricultural lawyer,

working to protect the rights of farmers and ranchers.

Flood says her time in the NJAA played a central role in forming this vision.

"These experiences helped me see the broader impact of our work; how our voices as young agriculturalists can influence public perception, preserve heritage and push the industry forward," she adds.

Flood receives a \$2,000 scholarship.

## ★ ADELAIDE HAVERKAMP ★

*Hometown: Bern, Kan.*

*Parents: Neal and Marya Haverkamp*

*High School: Nemaha Central High School*

*College: Kansas State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 11 years*



Adelaide Haverkamp is a strong believer in the idea that no matter how far you have come, there's always room to grow.

She's grateful for the ways the NJAA has helped her become a leader — giving her confidence to speak in front of crowds, teaching her what an effective teammate looks like and allowing her the opportunity to plan community service events.

"While I have gained these skills ... I believe I still have room for leadership potential," Haverkamp says. "We can always find ways to better ourselves and the community around us."

Currently Haverkamp is serving as second vice president for the Kansas Junior Angus Association and president for the NE District Kansas Junior Angus Association. Those accolades are certainly impressive, but her dream leadership position is to serve as the USDA director of communications.

While that path might be somewhere in Haverkamp's future, she wants to start a little smaller for the time being. She plans to stay close to home, venturing just an hour and a half away to attend school in Manhattan. After receiving a bachelor's degree, Haverkamp's goal is to work in the marketing division of an agricultural company.

"I would love to push the story of agriculture out to the world," she explains. "Knowing where your beef comes from, how it is raised and how it is prepared is an important part of being an aware consumer."

Haverkamp also has plans to stay involved in youth organizations, giving back to the ones who helped her along the way.

"I can never stress enough, to any youth, how important organizations like the NJAA, 4-H and FFA are to helping shape their future," she says.

To assist Haverkamp on her educational journey, the Auxiliary awards an \$1,800 scholarship.

## ★ CLARA HENDERSON ★

*Hometown: East Troy, Wis.*

*Parents: Chad and Rebecca Henderson*

*High School: Catholic Central High School*

*College: Harvard University*

*NJAA Tenure: 8 years*



On paper, Clara Henderson fits every quality of a leader. She was valedictorian of her high school, served as a captain for her cross-country team and has served as an officer for the Wisconsin Junior Angus Association since 2020.

But according to Henderson, leadership isn't a skill that came naturally.

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"I've never had that bright, outgoing quality that most associate with leaders," she admits. "For too long, I didn't think I could be a leader because of that."

Henderson says her perspective changed when she saw the variety of leaders within the NJAA and her state association. She names Lauren Gilbert, past member of the National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) of Directors, as a key influence.

Henderson uses words like "intelligent," "friendly" and "kind" to describe Gilbert, but remembers her being a bit quieter than the rest of the green coats on the team. Truthfully, Henderson says she saw herself in the NJAB member; saying Gilbert's influence showed her how an atypical leader can have just as big of an impact.

The junior took this fresh perspective and jumped into a variety of leadership roles, wanting to show other young people there's no mold for what makes someone a good leader.

Although Henderson is passionate about the agricultural industry, she doesn't see a life on the farm in her future. With plans to attend medical school after completing her bachelor's degree, Henderson has her sights set on helping rural communities as a psychologist.

"Agriculture is what it is because of the people we will lose if we don't take care of their needs: all of their needs, mental health included," Henderson emphasizes.

She's grateful for all the skills she's gained from her involvement in the Angus family: how to shake a hand, communicate effectively and listen

actively. It's because of organizations like the NJAA that Henderson feels confident to be a voice of change in the industry.

Henderson receives a \$2,200 scholarship to support her endeavors.

### ★ CLAIRE MURNIN ★

*Hometown: Pompeys Pillar, Mont.*

*Parents: Jared and Julie Murnin*

*High School: Shepherd High School*

*College: Montana State University or Kansas State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 17 years*



Her hands were shaking when Claire Murnin took her first steps into the dirt show ring at her first jackpot show.

She knew this would be one of many times she stepped foot into a show ring, but Murnin didn't anticipate the way this experience would have such a large influence in shaping her future.

It's her early involvement in the beef industry that led her to her current career goal — working as an agricultural lobbyist and using her voice to represent and protect the interests of U.S. farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers.

Her participation in NJAS events like career development, creative writing and extemporaneous speaking have encouraged Murnin's growth during her time as a junior.

"With the foundation I have built through NJAA, I am confident in my ability to lead, advocate and drive

meaningful change for American agriculture," Murnin says.

She has also attended conferences like Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) and Raising the Bar, which have helped expand her network of professionals in the industry. She admits with her career goals, having a solid network will be essential to influence change.

Backed by the experience built through a foundation in the Angus family, Murnin is ready to tackle whatever comes next.

"While my hands might not shake like they used to, I still get butterflies because my time in the livestock industry has been a transformative journey," she shares. "I am excited about the future and the opportunities that lie ahead, and I look forward to using my experiences to advocate for the agricultural community."

To support this mission, Murnin is offered a \$1,900 scholarship.

### ★ DALTON BIRDWELL ★

*Hometown: Bryson, Texas*

*Parents: Henry (Jr.) and Sheila Birdwell*

*High School: Bryson High School*

*College: Texas Tech University*

*NJAA Tenure: 10 years*



Being the seventh generation to raise cattle, you could say the cattle industry is a bit more than just a family tradition for Dalton Birdwell. It's a legacy.

A longtime member of the NJAA and the Texas Junior Angus

Association, Birdwell is passionate about living in that legacy. He's certainly proven himself, finding success in the show ring at all levels and even securing a win as the overall champion in the auctioneering contest at the 2024 NJAS.

Birdwell has also served in a variety of leadership roles for his state junior Angus association, most recently taking on the role of president for the last two years.

"I hope I have encouraged the younger members to take a chance and run for office even if they have not been active in the association since third grade as I was," he says.

The Texas junior is keeping his options open for the future, but he's not without ambition. Birdwell plans to attend Texas Tech University and study either animal science or agricultural communications.

He is interested in learning more about reproductive technologies like *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI) and also recognizes the necessity of telling the stories of producers who make their livelihood feeding the world. Knowing many producers need multiple sources of income, Birdwell also has interest in working as a paramedic.

"No matter the future career God blesses me with, I know that I will be successful," Birdwell says. "The agriculture lifestyle has taught me how to work hard for what I have."

His educational journey will be supported by the Auxiliary with an \$1,800 scholarship.

## ★ BRYCE HOFING ★

*Hometown: Coatesville, Ind.*

*Parents: Josh and Deanna Hofing*

*High School: Cascade High School*

*College: Kansas State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 10 years*



"For me, leadership isn't about holding a title, it's about taking action and setting an example."

Those are wise words from Bryce Hofing, an Angus junior from Coatesville, Ind., who has learned firsthand the influence of good leaders through his time with the Angus organization. He's been in leadership positions since he joined the Indiana Junior Angus Association in 2016, serving as a district director, membership chairman, secretary and most recently vice president.

"I strive to lead by example, encouraging others to step outside their comfort zones," Hofing says. "Leadership serves as a cornerstone of my aspirations for the future."

Now, Hofing is taking his aspiration to the next level. At the 2025 NJAS in Tulsa, Okla., he was elected to serve on the NJAB.

"Effective leaders possess the ability to inspire and unite others to achieve shared goals. I believe I have the potential to excel in leadership roles due to my enthusiasm for collaboration and my capacity to engage with people from diverse backgrounds," Hofing shares.

He names programs like the Angus Mentoring Program (AMP) and Raising the Bar as having been especially influential in his journey. After some encouragement from his mom at his first NJAS in 2016, Hofing stepped outside of his comfort zone

and said "hi" to some unfamiliar faces. Now, he can't walk through the barns at the NJAS without recognizing friends he has made from other parts of country.

Thanks to the opportunities for growth he found in the NJAA, Hofing feels prepared to enter the next phase of his life. After his tenure with the NJAB, Hofing plans to pursue a career in construction management by obtaining a bachelor's degree from Kansas State University (K-State). The Auxiliary is honored to support this ambition with a \$2,100 scholarship.

## ★ SAMUEL JORDAN ★

*Hometown: Savannah, Mo.*

*Parents: Monica and Matthew Jordan*

*High School: Savannah High School*

*College: Redlands Community College*

*NJAA Tenure: 18 years*



Uncertainty. It's what Missouri junior Samuel Jordan believes is the biggest issue facing the beef industry today. This young cattleman knows firsthand just how unpredictable things like weather, economics and politics can be — and the substantial influence they have on the industry.

While he can't control the weather, Jordan does believe U.S. ranchers can continue to effectively feed the world by committing to sustainable practices and educational advocacy. But it can't just be a solo venture, he stresses. It's something everyone must be committed to, especially as society becomes further removed from production agriculture.

It's a matter of teamwork; a virtue Jordan credits the NJAA with helping him develop.

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"Teamwork is essential in all walks of life," he says. "Whether that be in the livestock industry, an educational setting, or day-to-day life. Working together increases your knowledge and experience."

Jordan has seen the benefits of teamwork in many aspects of his life. After he and three other team members won the NJAS team fitting contest, Jordan helped the Missouri team the following year, this time as a coach. The state found its way to another first-place finish.

"We achieve more when we collaborate and support one another," he emphasizes.

Now, Jordan is joining a new team at Redlands Community College. He plans to obtain his associate degree and start his collegiate livestock judging career. After that, he wants to attend a four-year university to study animal science and pursue his goal of working in animal nutrition.

To help make this dream a reality, the Auxiliary awards Jordan a \$2,200 scholarship.

### ★ JACOB MARKSBURY ★

*Hometown: Buffalo, Ky.*

*Parents: Rooter and Jamie Gray*

*High School: LaRue County High School*

*College: University of Kentucky*

*NJAA Tenure: 10 years*



If you ask Jacob Marksby what the cattle industry has taught him, he'll give you a list. A strong

work ethic, teamwork, confidence and problem solving are just a few of the key values he has developed.

As he says, "Raising livestock is not for the faint of heart, much like life. Life throws you curveballs, but how you react to those challenges is the real lesson."

Marksby grew up on a farm in Kentucky, where his family runs a herd of nearly 100 registered Angus cattle. This foundation in *The Business Breed* set him up for success in more ways than one.

After attending his first NJAS in Grand Island, Neb., in 2016, Marksby jumped headfirst into the opportunities offered by the NJAA, competing in contests, attending leadership conferences and seeking success in the show ring. He shares how thankful he is for the network he has developed in each of these spaces, finding friends and mentors across the country.

"This network will be valuable in the future when applying for jobs or residency programs," he explains.

For his future, Marksby is going to start the path toward a degree in agricultural biotechnology this fall at the University of Kentucky. He is excited to see how this will allow him to use his love for agriculture to prepare him for his ultimate goal of attending medical school.

Marksby says he sees medicine and agriculture as interconnected fields, as rural areas still need access to effective medical care.

"Showing Angus cattle has prepared me for life," Marksby says.

"You must work hard, day in and day out, to achieve your goals, whether that is winning grand champion at the National Junior Angus Show or being accepted into medical school."

His goals are supported by the Auxiliary with a \$2,000 scholarship.

### ★ JACKSON MCCURRY ★

*Hometown: Colwich, Kan.*

*Parents: Jesse and Rhonda McCurry*

*High School: Andale High School*

*College: Kansas State University*

*NJAA Tenure: 18 years*



Working with Angus cattle is a passion for Jackson McCurry. Not because it's all he's ever known, but because he truly loves it.

"It's easy for me to say that I am hooked," he admits.

His dedication to the beef industry has bled into other parts of his life, most recently leading him to help his entire animal science class become Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certified. After completing the certification himself and seeing the value of the information, McCurry convinced his teacher to replace the final exam with BQA certification.

McCurry has shown his dedication to the Angus breed in other ways, too. He recently finished a term as secretary for the Kansas Junior Angus Association, served as a mentor for AMP at the 2024 NJAS and has attended multiple Raising the Bar

and Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conferences.

While he's given a lot, McCurry has also gained a multitude of skills from his involvement.

"I strongly believe that my ability to communicate with others has been improved because of my time in the NJAA," he says.

McCurry remembers his first NJAS in 2017, where he didn't know many

people outside of his state. Now, thanks to older members who took time to get to know him, McCurry has a network of Angus friends across the country.

As this junior prepares for the next phase of his life at K-State, McCurry says he plans to stay involved in the Angus industry for the foreseeable future. He hopes to run for a position on the NJAB in two years, which

would give him the opportunity to pour into other junior members looking for a community.

McCurry's ultimate goal is to come back and help run the family ranch, McCurry Brothers.

"It's because of my Angus experiences that I can make such confident plans," he says.

McCurry receives a \$1,900 scholarship. **A**



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