



CONNECTIONS

Director of Angus Link Chris Engel puts his prior experience to use in leading the Association's new feeder-calf program.

by Kasey Brown, associate editor

Connections are imperative in agriculture. Agriculturalists need to be connected to their consumers. Seedstock breeders need to be connected to their commercial customers.

Chris Engel is connecting his suburban upbringing to leading the largest beef cattle breed association's newly launched feeder-calf program. The program itself epitomizes the connection between quality feeder calves and the registered Angus bulls that sire a calf crop. The link is extended between the cow-calf and fed-cattle segments. The ultimate goal of the program is to strengthen the link between the Association and the commercial cattle sector.

With "link" clearly being a common theme, the program is aptly named Angus LinkSM.

Engel's varied background and "take the bull by the horns"

mentality have given experience to make these necessary connections. He laughs that the path that prepared him to take on the Angus Link program is much like the *Slumdog Millionaire* movie, in which seemingly random experiences prepared him for the situation at hand.

Early connections

Having grown up 24 miles outside of New York City with a father who works at Merrill Lynch and a mother who was a business manager at a ballet company, Engel says he's a bit of a black sheep in the family. His brother is a neurobiologist, and his sister is

a clothes buyer in New York City. He chuckles that conversations at Thanksgiving are always interesting. His interests, though, led him outdoors.

His aunt and uncle live in Vermont, and as a young boy, he toured an agritourist dairy farm near them and loved it. With a personality that reaches out and creates his own opportunities, in middle school he emailed the owners of the dairy to see if they needed any summer help.

A few years later, he emailed land-grant schools along the East Coast to see if they would hire a high-school student to work on their university farm. While he loved working at the dairy, he wasn't sure milking was what he wanted to do.

Most of the schools didn't have an opportunity for a high schooler, but a Clemson official reached

out and told him about the South Carolina Commissioner's School for Agriculture.

This is a partnership between Clemson University and the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, designed for rising junior and senior high-school students. It provides leadership and career training, and offers students opportunities to consider careers in agriculture through coursework in livestock production, forestry and natural resources, and plant science.

Engel fell in love with Clemson and went there to earn his bachelor's degree in animal science. A professor took him under his wing and caught him up on the production agriculture side that his suburban background didn't give him.

After graduation, he interned

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with the Yon family in Ridge Spring, S.C. They became like a second family to him and introduced him to many people in the beef cattle industry. He says he wasn't sure what he wanted to do just yet, but Lydia Yon's brother, who would frequent the farm, was in the pharmaceutical industry, and Engel decided he would try it.

He interviewed with Pfizer, actually interviewing with now American Angus Association CEO Allen Moczygemba, who was working at Pfizer then. Pfizer didn't have a position for him at the time, but Engel says Moczygemba gave him some great advice.

"He said, 'It's okay to take a winding path to get to where you want to go,'" Engel recalls.

Engel admits he was lucky to have found his passion at an early age, but he was willing to try other avenues to get there. Growing up, he wanted to be a veterinarian and thought the only way to work with animals was to be a vet or a farmer.

At Clemson, he learned "there is so much middle ground though. There are so many more opportunities in the agriculture industry," he assures.

That advice led him to take a job with Helena Agri-Enterprises LLC, an agronomic solutions company with which Engel held several different positions throughout the Carolinas, working with many different types of crops. That first position required a steep learning curve on crop knowledge and salesmanship.

Though he wasn't working with livestock, he gained valuable information.

"Everyone needs that solid foundation," he says, referring to his crop knowledge. "The crop side is critical to raising animals for food, but I didn't really like going out in pastures and fields and selling chemicals all the time. Then I got a phone call out of the blue telling me a position with Merck Animal Health was opening up."

He became a territory manager for Merck based in Charlotte, N.C.,

covering parts of five states in the Southeast. With his added experience from Merck Animal Health, he was exposed to all aspects needed to succeed in the beef industry.

His go-getter attitude served him well in sales and ultimately led him to become the marketing manager for cattle vaccines in the United States based out of De Soto, Kan.

These work experiences helped him better manage relationships, taught him about marketing and advertising, and gave him experience in managing a budget. Most importantly, he learned that no matter the job or the title, what he enjoyed most was helping people.

"I love to learn. One of the coolest things about life is the opportunity to learn new things. In development, it doesn't matter where you start; it matters where you want to be," Engel says. "I love taking on challenges. I know I'm young, but I have had impactful experiences that have prepared me to take on different challenges."

Link to Angus

So, what attracted his attention to Angus? He's been in agriculture for about half of his life now, and "Angus was a big part of the families who played a role in making me who I am," he says.

He even met his wife at the Angus Convention in 2015 in Overland Park, Kan. Having been married just over a year, they now both work at Angus. Abigail Engel works as a print services coordinator for Angus Media. He says this is a huge blessing. The carpool benefit aside, he says they both are passionate about this industry, and he loves that they can share that.

He heard about the Angus Link



The Tie Between AngusSource and Angus Link

Angus LinkSM is not replacing AngusSource[®]. It is a complement to the previously existing program, explains Ginette Gottswiller, director of commercial programs for the American Angus Association. AngusSource itself has changed considerably, adding more value-added options (see story on page 60).

With Angus Link being introduced to document the genetic potential of the feeder cattle more accurately, AngusSource has moved to age- and source-verification only, so Gateway was disbanded.

AngusSource will continue as a USDA Process Verified Program (PVP) using AngusSource radio frequency identification (RFID) program-compliant tags to denote enrolled calves in its age- and source-verification program. Producers will be able to add one or all of the following options: Non-hormone-Treated Cattle (NHTC), AS-NeverEver3, Cattle Care & Handling, and Calf Management (Preventative Health).

Tag prices increased marginally because feeders and packers noted that RFID tags are more useful than dangle tags. A service organization, the Association will waive the enrollment fee for members if they enroll in both AngusSource and Angus Link.

Association prices are still lower than the other verification companies, and Association employees take customer service seriously, with the added benefit of cattle knowledge.

"We tried to make everything *a la carte* so producers could pick what fits best for their marketing plan and their price point," Gottswiller says.

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program at Angus Convention this past November in Fort Worth, Texas. He was intrigued by the possibilities, without knowing then that he would come to lead it.

"I'm a puzzle person. I like seeing the different pieces. When I heard about it at convention, I thought it was bold and interesting. Angus has all of the pieces to make a whole picture. This program needs no sales pitch, because it can truly deliver value to all segments of the beef industry. It will help those who use it; it will be a benefit to people and the industry as a whole. If anybody can do it, it's Angus," he assures.

He says there is a great team at Angus, and people in the industry

want to see this program succeed.

"I have a heart to serve. I want to help members meet or exceed their goals," he says. Working at Angus gives him the opportunity to get out of the office to ask questions, work alongside breeders, and experience different segments of the industry in different areas of the country.

"The only way to know people is to roll up your sleeves and sweat next to them, or share a meal and listen to them talk about what they're so proud about. I'll measure my success on the success of those we're going to be impacting, and I hope there's a lot of them," he says. ■