The “Formula” for Beef Business Success

Growing up in the small town of Bassett, Paul Engler had little idea how much success he would have in the cattle industry. He did know the value of hard work and a solid education. This led to his decision to attend the University of Nebraska. He declared animal husbandry as his major and worked at the University’s hog farm where he earned 60 cents per hour. He graduated from the University in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Out of college he worked as a vocational agriculture instructor and later at a cattle company in Valentine. It was through those experiences and a visit to Hereford, Texas, in 1960 on a cattle-buying trip that prompted Engler to start a cattle feeding operation in the Texas Panhandle. This operation is now known across the world as Cactus Feeders.

With nine feedlots and a one-time capacity of 520,000 head, Cactus Feeders is one of the largest cattle feeding

Livestock Judging Accumulates More than Points with Valuable Experience

Often involving long practice hours and even longer hours crammed in a tight van, the experience is worth it for the members of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln livestock judging team.

After returning from winter break early for a 10-day judging workout across the state, the judging team has benefited from its hours of work with a competitive spring season.

The team participated in five contests this spring, placing in the top 10 at all five. UNL judging coach Matt Ellicott believes consistency is one of the team’s greatest strengths.

“Not only is the team consistent, but it has experienced some success,” Ellicott said. “A high point of the season so far was placing first in cattle judging at Sioux Falls.”

The Iowa Beef Expo was especially exciting for Annie Doerr and Jason Warner, who both received perfect scores in the oral reasons component of the contest. Doerr, an agricultural education junior, said she believes she has improved more in giving oral reasons than in any other aspect of judging.

“Before, I was scared of reasons, and I didn’t know much about them,” Doerr said. “I’ve learned it’s all about boosting your confidence and backing up the decisions you mark on the card.”

Doerr also said she believes participating on the judging team has really enhanced her experience at the University.

It has helped her practice time management and setting priorities.

“It really teaches the meaning of dedication. If you want something, you have to put a lot into it,” she said.

Warner, a junior in the animal science and grazing livestock systems degree programs, said he has greatly benefited from being part of the judging team. Through 4-H and FFA, Warner gained experience in livestock judging and knew when he came to college he wanted to be involved.
Alumni Helping Promote UNL/CASNR

Fellow Alumni,

As I noted in my previous letter, this is an exciting time to be a part of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources family! Enrollment at the college is up; new, exciting and innovative degree programs and options are available to CASNR students; and the retention percentage (freshman to sophomore) is higher than any other college in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln system. In short, CASNR continues to move ahead.

I have recently been asked to be a part of the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) Strategic Plan Advisory Committee for 2008–2016. CASNR alumni are considered partners to this strategic plan, especially regarding recruitment and retention of students in CASNR programs and as valued stakeholders in the growth and success of the University, the college and the State of Nebraska. In total, revision of the strategic plan will be a very complicated process with an end result that, we hope, continues to measure the success and growth of IANR and CASNR programs. This has been evident with the measurable results for the 2005–2007 plan, which will be a solid foundation for all future planning of this type.

Our primary emphasis at this point is recruitment. We need to find a way to keep increasing the number of resident and non-resident high school graduates who select the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and specifically CASNR programs, as educational opportunities. We need to be prepared to sell the advantages of a UNL/CASNR education.

We also need to make an effort to recruit new members for the CASNR Alumni Association. Your college Alumni Association presently is on very sound footing with active and successful programs, but continued membership growth also is important. In addition, the CASNR Alumni Association meeting board is always looking for alumni who are willing to serve as board members to ensure the continued enthusiasm and growth that we are making at present. Please let us know if you are willing and able to help UNL/CASNR and the CASNR Alumni Association meet these goals.*

CASNR Alumni Association Achievement and Service Awards will be given at the CASNR Week Banquet in April. Other college alumni association events include the Salute to Graduates ceremony and the Senior Send-off hosted in conjunction with graduation. The CASNR Alumni Association Football Reunion and Silent Auction scholarship fundraiser takes place each fall. More information about all of these programs is available at www.casnr.unl.edu under “Alumni, Friends and Donors.”

Finally, I want to acknowledge all of the support the CASNR Alumni Association receives from the Dean’s Office and the people there who see I keep on track. They make this job easy and they truly care about your alumni association. Please note the listing of these fine individuals in this issue of the Sower.

Help if you can!

—Daryl A. Cisney, President CASNR Alumni Association

*Contact Paul Horton at phorton2@unl.edu or (402)472-3936.
operations in the United States. Cactus Feeders began operations in 1975 under the direction of Engler as co-founder. Engler had a vision to utilize the excellent climate, available feed grain and feeder cattle to operate his feedlot on a large-scale basis.

He began marketing beef using the “formula,” which was a precursor to “grid marketing” utilized in the industry today. Grid marketing prices cattle based on quality and yield grade, and other factors, and includes a structure for premiums and discounts. In addition to nine feedlots, Cactus Feeders owns and operates three ranches in Texas and New Mexico. These ranches are home to 2,000 cows and 30,000 stocker calves.

Cactus Feeders operates under a unique ownership setting. The company is owned by the 500-plus Cactus Feeders’ employees. An Employee Stock Ownership plan was developed to create an opportunity for each employee to have a share of the responsibility and ownership. Engler has formed a company whose employees feed more than half a million head of cattle as if they were their own.

Engler was recently recognized at the 2008 National Cattlemen’s Beef Association Trade Show and Convention in Reno, Nevada, with the Vision Award for his success as a cattle feeder. The Vision Award recognizes individuals, businesses and organizations in the cattle industry that have incorporated innovation into their operations in an effort to enhance not only their business, but also the industry as a whole. Engler easily meets the requirements for this award through his development of value-based marketing, enabling marketing processes that award quality, consistency of his beef product and true animal value throughout the beef chain. In addition, he was among the first to introduce large-scale commercial cattle feeding into the Texas Panhandle.

Today, Cactus Feeders continues to be the world’s largest cattle feeder in total pen capacity, and the world’s largest privately owned cattle feeding company. Engler does not dwell on his accomplishments, however, and encourages young people to become involved in the business.

“It’s a great business to be in; but you have to enjoy it,” Engler said. “The key to success is your ability to manage risk.”

How will young people manage this risk? Following the example of Paul Engler and Cactus Feeders will provide a great start.

—Matt Dolch

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“In high school I set it as a goal for myself to compete on the UNL judging team,” Warner said. “I wanted to meet new kids, get to know people and compete for the University. I consider it another learning experience, but out of the classroom.”

Both Doerr and Warner said they encourage anyone who is even moderately interested in livestock judging to check out the team.

“You’ll use what you learn. It’s definitely worth it,” said Doerr.

Warner said livestock judging has helped him not only recognize good livestock, but it has also improved his communication skills. Giving oral reasons helps students practice communicating the reasons behind their decisions.

“I’ve learned to really try and keep an open mind. No matter what my opinion I’m not always right,” Warner said. “It’s good to understand why I’m wrong and learn how to swallow my pride.”

The team finished its spring season on March 19 in Houston, Texas, and will continue judging in the fall.

“All the members and coaches are appreciative of the producers and alumni who have helped and supported us in our effort to be a successful judging team,” Ellicott said.

Team members include Roger Morgan, Burwell; Kyle Dorn, Adams; Garret Koester, Wellfleet; Shantille Kruse, Tecumseh; Tony Roubal, North Bend; Doerr, Creighton; and Warner, Arapahoe.

—Laura Maricle

The UNL Livestock Judging Team had a competitive spring judging season. Pictured here are team members (front row, L–R) Annie Doerr, Creighton; Tony Roubal, North Bend; Jason Warner, Arapahoe; (back row, L–R) coach Matt Ellicott; Roger Morgan, Burwell; Garret Koester, Wellfleet; Shantille Kruse, Tecumseh; Kyle Dorn, Adams; coach Ben Williams.

From East Campus to Corporate Office, Hard Work Pays Off for CASNR Alumnus

Hard work — whether it’s manual labor, often sun-up until sun-down in rural Nebraska, or the fast-paced, competitive brand associated with the Internet, 1988 College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources graduate Ryan Downs knows a thing or two about it.

Originally from Hershey, Downs has worked hard his whole life. Farm life along with sports, academics and clubs kept him busy in high school. With strong family support, Downs left his hometown to attend college at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

As an agribusiness major, Downs was very active in his fraternity, FarmHouse, and throughout campus. Maintaining a 4.0 GPA, he was honored with a nomination to the prestigious Innocent’s Society as one of the top 13 seniors at UNL. The work paid off with an acceptance letter to Harvard Law School, from which he graduated.

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CASNR Benefits from NU Foundation Efforts

The University of Nebraska Foundation's involvement with the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources encourages UNL alumni to get involved.

Ann Bruntz, foundation development director for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, is working to build support for CASNR. Bruntz meets with alumni, as well as commodity groups, foundations and corporations with agricultural and natural resources interests.

“I try to meet with alumni in CASNR to help with scholarship support and programs with the college,” Bruntz said.

The foundation has assets with a market value of more than $1 billion.

“I try to match up donor interest with student, faculty and program needs,” Bruntz said.

Efforts by people such as Bruntz have contributed to the foundation’s current financial standing. Continued generous involvement by UNL’s alumni will ensure future success.

The University of Nebraska Foundation is an independent, legally incorporated non-profit organization that strives to solicit, administer and distribute funds to make the University more useful to Nebraska and Nebraskans.

—Tess Kirkholm

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Though his roots are in rural Nebraska, Downs, his wife Valerie, their twins Lauren and Emily, and son Carson now live in Saratoga, Calif.

His work comes in a much different form than it once did. Downs works as the senior vice president of Worldwide Operations with PayPal, an Internet company in conjunction with eBay.

Since Downs started with PayPal in 2001, the company has increased revenues to more than $1 billion per year and received the 2005 Electronic Payments International Award for best non-card payment product.

East Campus and agriculture’s connection to Downs’s life might seem a bit removed today, but his strong sense of hard work and determination, acquired first in the cab of a tractor and then in the classroom at UNL, has followed him through every step of life.

—Amareese Bettin