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Board Commentary

by John Eklund, 1st Vice President/Director Region B

Why have a Junior program?

How you answer this question might depend on many things...

Your age! Do you have children or grandchildren of your own? Do you have direct ties to the Junior show ring? Are you an optimist or pessimist? Do you derive a substantial part of your income from agriculture? Do you accept responsibility?

You see, I believe we have (and need) a Junior program for many, many reasons. Let's consider a few.

Not long ago, I heard a dear friend of mine who is currently about 38 years old (many of you know him) run down the list of people that he showed and competed with and against through the Junior beef cattle program. As he remembered these friends and noted their career choices, it was incredibly enlightening as to the power of these programs to guide young people into agriculture. The list included breed executives, Ag service companies, semen company executives, Ag bankers, cattle feeders, and the list went on. The percentage of active Juniors that went on to a career in agriculture was amazing. Granted, these kids very likely had other influences as well, but the statistics were convincing that a positive experience in a Junior program at this magical and impressionable age played a big role in their choice to pursue careers in agriculture. Consequently, if you need the products and services that these folks provide, then you have a real need for a successful Junior program!

If part of your business is to provide cattle to Juniors for show purposes, you know the "compensation" these kids provide is much more than the dollars they pay for a show heifer. I love being around these Ag kids. They are full of energy, ideas, and

enthusiasm. They are also pretty good communicators and negotiators! I believe that the huge effort put into the Junior show program across the country is much more than blue ribbons and college scholarships (although they are extremely important). What I think is even more important are the concepts of hard work, delayed gratification, and life dependency that animal projects provide these kids. The life lessons learned through caring for animals are truly everlasting, and the relationships and business we build with these kids helps us in many ways.

Finally, as a Christian, and a parent, I believe we have a responsibility to our kids (by blood and by association) to provide opportunities for them to learn, prepare, work, and then win! And when a victory is not attained, or a project fails to meet expectations, a soft place to land is provided to yield correction and adjustment in order to improve for the future. The stand-out Red Angus Junior Roundup hits just about every one of those targets. The program offers a multitude of contests that are leadership and career based, plus the opportunity to see the country and meet stalwarts of agriculture. It is very refreshing in today's often cut-throat world, to see this take place in a setting where older Juniors look-out and support the younger kids. I have so enjoyed witnessing the maturity, courtesy, professionalism, and self-confidence that our Red Angus Juniors possess.

So chalk it up to blind optimism if you like; I am convinced that a strong Junior program helps build our agriculture future and character in our kids. While this program will not likely produce an Olympic athlete, or famous singer, it may very well implant the love for agriculture combined with the self-confidence and work ethic that produces **the next large animal vet willing to make farm calls for cattle!** ■