

Cattle that work for you. This doesn't mean that these cows will be haying or fixing machinery for you but that they will be able to raise a calf to weaning, breed back every year and be feed efficient, therefore saving you money in the long run.

Over the course of the past ten years my knowledge in the field of agriculture, and more specifically, the cattle industry, has come from a variety of sources. From the color commentating my dad offers when my family preconditions and works our herd, to the long hours my mom spends walking through large pens of black angus bulls trying to get the perfect picture of each impressive animal for our sale catalog, my knowledge of the cattle industry has had amazing sources from which to draw. I have had many experiences learning from a number of top angus producers, and most recently had a behind-the-scenes look into the workings of Shipwheel Cattle Company. In the course of ten short weeks I was able to identify this company's mission, goals, and leadership style along with the numerous internship/career opportunities available for this company. When you look at this company's sale catalog in late November, it may look seamless and glamorous. But behind that shiny catalog is hundreds of hours of grueling work and sometimes individual isolation. From looking for and identifying noxious weeds to spray and kill in the precious pastures they produce their top of the line black angus cattle, to mending miles of fence to confine these impressive animals in their separate pastures during summer grazing. There is also a tremendous amount of time spent making sure all of the machinery in this operation are running in top condition to maintain a high and efficient work rate during haying season and feeding their cattle during the winter and spring in the feedlot. This is only the beginning. The immense amount of paperwork and data that comes

with managing and maintaining the health and condition of 1,250 mama cows and feeding out 500 yearling heifers. This, and more, is the work that goes unnoticed at first glance of their admirable catalog and herd. This is all made easier when the cattle work for you. What I mean by this is that these cows are easy fleshing, maternal and built to last. These are just some of the traits that Shipwheel Cattle Company implements into their herd.

The mission of Shipwheel is to do everything on the ranch they can do themselves while raising their cattle in a real, un-pampered environment. Some of the skills this requires are great knowledge of the environment, cattle, and machinery to list a few. Along with knowledge comes hard work in rain, snow, shine or even in -30-degree temperatures, and that's not taking into account the wind chill. Task management is another major skill needed to run a large family ranch. Running a ranch is a 24 hour, 365-day job. At all hours someone is contributing, whether it be mending fence or doing paperwork. On a ranch this size there are always tasks to be done and those tasks must be done at the most efficient rate possible to maintain and keep a successful ranch such as Shipwheel running at all times. Sometimes even quick thinking is needed. In these situations, knowledge also comes into play. For example, if a calf needs to be pulled, if this is not done quickly and effectively you risk losing not only the calf but the cow as well.

Along with a mission comes goals. Shipwheel's goals are to produce the most functional, balanced trait cattle that excel in every segment of the industry. These cattle are expected to perform with less input in the extreme climate and rugged terrain of the Bear Paw Mountains in North Central Montana. In order to accomplish this goal, they must choice select breed for specific traits such as longevity, easy fleshing, strong maternal instincts and good milk. Without these traits these cattle would not be able to produce in their environment.

The leadership skills used are very straightforward. As a hired hand, I was presented the assignment each day given descriptive instructions and was expected to complete the task. Many times, I was led by example. These examples were often done by owners Klint or Lori, but sometimes done by their junior high-aged son, Austin, or their long-time hired hand, Craig. All of them, particularly Klint and Lori, completed daily tasks with ease and experience, while explaining how they liked specific things done or what to avoid when doing certain jobs. I was, however, almost pleasantly surprised to experience some less-than ideal moments with them, which usually happened when working with unpredictable cattle. There were times when Klint's voice resembled by dad's, loud and a bit colorful--a stark change from Klint's usual, soft-spoken tone. Or when Lori loudly questioned the culling of the older, productive cow, right after that same cow rammed into the panel I was holding and sent another worker up another panel. It was almost comforting to be in the presence of someone else's family experiencing similar challenges that mine have over the years, knowing their continued success in the cattle industry. Things don't always go as planned, even for the most experienced ranchers. The leadership at Shipwheel imparts that you stick with it, do your part, and continue to improve upon and be proud of what you do.

Internship opportunities are present in different areas at Shipwheel. Because they synchronize and AI all 1250 head, this would be great for an intern to experience the breeding world using AI and synchronization methods. Depending on the synchronization method being used, a tremendous amount of organization, planning, time and manpower is needed for a highly successful AI program. Added to that, this company alone could have upwards of ten different sire groups. Another internship opportunity would be in the marketing field, learning what it takes to market their registered bulls for sale. It takes a tremendous amount of time and money,

not to mention connections in the angus business, to get the word out about what makes each breeder's herd more appealing than the next. It's important to carefully select where to advertise, considering the location of your market focus, to how much bang you can get for your buck, to the timing and look of the advertisements. Sometimes paying quite a bit more to advertise with a well-known representative pays off more than trying to get the word out by choosing specific catalogs and papers to place your ads. An intern could get first-hand experience with the process of photographing and videoing each bull, to editing those pictures and videos, to entering data for each bull into spreadsheets, to the layout of a well-defined sale catalog. Not to mention preparing bulls for the sale, which includes ultrasounding, fertility testing, genetic and disease testing, and clipping each bull. This, along with learning the expense vs. return is invaluable information for someone planning to continue a family operation, or wanting to work for one.

In conclusion, Shipwheel Cattle Company would be a great place for me to not only work during the summer but also eventually intern. I have visited with a couple of Shipwheel's past employees, who speak volumes of the positive work experience as well as the amount of knowledge the Swansons impart about the cattle industry and marketing of their business. Along with this comes the opportunity to network with other top angus producers. Klint and Lori both serve or have served on local, regional, and currently, national angus board of directors. Though I don't believe this in itself is an important function of their company, it is one of many valuable pieces that come together to continue to improve and move forward in a competitive angus business. I feel strongly that a solid learning experience and reputable internship can be had from a formidable operation known as Shipweel Cattle Company, located in the Bear Paw Mountains in Northcentral Montana.

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