

# FAITH, FAMILY & FOCUS

By Kindra Gordon

Kory Ostrand's first purebred Angus heifer was a 4-H project in the '90s. He built a small herd of purebred females and by high school was selling seedstock bulls to neighboring producers.

Today, Ostrand and his family have 400 Angus cows – and even Ostrand is a little surprised to be living his lifelong dream.

He tells, "Growing up it was my goal to have 400 registered cows and have an annual production sale. I just didn't think it would happen by age 32." But with hard work, family support, faith – and a unique opportunity to expand – it has.

Ostrand's upbringing was shaped by four generations before him setting an example of working hard and being creative with their agricultural pursuits – including raising purebred hogs in the 1980s, from which the income helped the family get started with Angus. As well, a small dairy entity influenced Ostrand's work ethic as a youth. He notes, "My siblings and I learned at any early age how to work. Today anytime we are faced with a repetitive job, we say, 'It's just like milking cows.'"

Ostrand adds, "My dad taught me a lot, and I don't always admit that. He taught me to work and stick with it."

Today, the Ostrands are focused solely on beef cattle. Kory and Danielle work together and involve their kids. "They are young, but enjoy being out there," Ostrand says. The family operation includes Kory's parents Neil and Julie Ostrand, his aunt Kathy Ostrand, and paternal grandmother Caroline who still lives on the ranch. Sister Kara and her husband Seth Behrens live nearby – she works for Farm Credit; he assists Neil with a commercial herd and feeding 800 to 900 calves annually. Ostrand's oldest brother works in the North Dakota oil industry. He also counts cousin Chris Hogg, who helps with day-to-day crop and cattle work, as a valuable part of the operation.

Of their custom feedlot, many calves they feed out are sired by the registered Angus bulls they sell – and by finishing them they can collect carcass data. They also collect genetic data via ultrasound and 50K genetic testing, but having actual carcass data is still something Ostrand feels is critical.

## Turning Point

In 2012, Ostrand's purebred Angus herd had reached 100 head when a fellow Angus breeder

extended a unique opportunity. Mark Slagle at Sargent, Neb., was downsizing his registered herd and offered Ostrand the opportunity to purchase 300 head. Kory and Danielle contemplated the offer throughout December – then took the leap to expand buying 200 Angus cows and 100 bred heifers.

Over the past five years, the couple has worked closely with the Slagles. A joint production sale is held at the Slagle ranch (about 50 miles from Ostrand's) on the third Wednesday in February, with Ostrand offering 120 bulls, Slagle offering 40 bulls and 50 open heifers also offered.

"It's been working really well," says Ostrand. He credits Slagle for being a mentor, enhancing his knowledge of breeding programs and introducing him to new sale customers.

Slagle and Ostrand have focused on cattle genetics that offer size and performance. All cows in the Ostrand herd are AI'd for two cycles in April and May. The resulting progeny speak for themselves – one customer's calves gained from 4 to 6 pounds ADG in the feedlot, coming in at about 900 pounds, and finishing at 1,600. The 2016 steer-mates to Ostrand's bulls finished at 18 percent Prime. Ostrand says, "I feel like we are going in the right direction and we'll work to keep that number going up."

While Ostrand's goals have seemingly fallen into place, he notes that it hasn't been "all roses." Land base and feedstuffs are challenges he has maneuvered in expanding. "It's hard to find land to rent," he says.

He has purchased pasture near Ansley, Neb. and credits his maternal grandparents Keith and Marilyn Hogg for providing the opportunity to purchase their farmland near Ansley as well, about 10 miles from Ostrand's home place. To add pasture, he recently seeded 70 acres of irrigated land there to a brome-timothy-alfalfa mix for summer grazing by heifers. Ostrand also relies on cornstalks to graze in November and December.

Ahead, Ostrand's priorities include maintaining cowherd numbers, offering quality bulls and building relationships with customers. "We are fortunate to have a lot of repeat buyers," and Ostrand says he enjoys getting to know them and their cattle.

For others starting out and dreaming big – like he once did, Ostrand advises: "Don't be afraid to stick your neck out and get right into it. Opportunity and support from family helps, but take a chance here and there."



32-years-old

Owner, Ostrand Angus

Associate's degree/livestock and business focus (2005), Southeast Community College, Beatrice, Neb.

**Background:** Ostrand is the fifth generation on his family's operation. The ranch's history has included his dad and grandfather raising commercial cattle, as well as purebred hogs in the '80s and a small 35-head dairy up until the early 2000s. Today, the operation is all beef cattle and some row crops.

**Family:** Wife, Danielle, son, Brexton, 5; and twin daughters, Avery and Olivia, 3.

**Industry Involvement:** Supporting local 4-H and FFA programs are important to Ostrand, since they were part of his upbringing. He has served on the beef committee for the Custer County Fair for a decade and was the 2017 Beef Superintendent. (This year's show had 184 steers and 45 breeding heifers). He is also active in his local church and served as a director for three years in the Nebraska Angus Association.

**Mantra in Life:** "If God brings you to it, He'll bring you through it." That's one I rely on quite a bit, says Ostrand.

**Favorite Hobby:** Saddling up with the kids and riding pasture or going fishing as a family.

**Industry Concern:** Ostrand recognizes that the beef industry must continue to educate consumers that beef is a safe, nutritious product. "We must help consumers have the confidence to keep buying beef," he says.