

OPINION



Cattlemen's Young Leaders program is a great way to kick-start your career

The application deadline for this year's program is looming and it's an opportunity you shouldn't pass up

BY TESSA NYBO

The future of the cattle industry in Canada is looking promising for the next generation of cattlemen and women.

With more 'skin in the game' than ever before, today's young cattlemen interested in going back to the farm or starting out on their own have a variety of complex tasks ahead of them. Developing leadership skills and industry connections is imperative to long-term career success for those planning a career in the beef industry.

There is no better resource to help guide a young person through these challenges than someone who has been there themselves. Moreover, today's young cattle producers will be expected to replace the current leadership as the baby boomer generation takes a step back.

The Cattlemen's Young Leaders program was developed in 2010 as a program aimed at providing industry-specific training and mentorship to youth to assist the beef industry into the future.

And it's working.

"The networking opportunities are incredible, and the program is very

personalized," says Andrew Kopechuk, a current mentee in the program.

"You can spell out exactly what you want from your mentorship and what you get out of it is all about what you put into it."

Kopechuk is from RSK Farms, a second-generation mixed grain and purebred Hereford operation near Brandon, Man. He was paired with mentor Carson Moneo of Peak Dot Ranches, one of the largest Angus herds in Canada, in the rolling hills of Wood Mountain, Sask. Kopechuk had clear goals going into his mentorship with hopes of taking his purebred operation to the next level and seeking out international opportunities for marketing RSK Farms genetics. "We were on the road to getting there, but advice from Carson has sped up the process and helped us to open doors. We have successfully marketed embryos into Denmark and Sweden." The Cattlemen's Young Leaders program is open to beef industry enthusiasts aged 18 to 35 from across Canada. The online application process is simple and semifinalists are chosen from the applications, and then invited to participate in roundtable discussions on pertinent industry topics at the CYL Spring Forum in March. Out of that group, 16 mentees are cho-

sen and paired with industry veterans based on their own personal interests and goals.

The mentorships start in May, with the mentees developing a road map of goals with their mentor. They also have a budget of up to \$2,000 to participate in industry events. Additional domestic and international travel opportunities are also available throughout the duration of the program. The mentorship officially goes until February, however, many mentors and mentees develop a friendship that continues long after the official program is over.

Nor do the opportunities end when you graduate, as graduates of the program are eligible to participate in select CYL events after their official mentorship is completed.

Jamie-Rae Pittman, a current CYL mentor praises the connections the program offers participants.

"It's never a matter of knowing it all, but rather being resourceful enough to reach out and tap into your sources to provide the expertise and know-how to satisfy those questions," says Pittman.

Originally from a purebred Angus background, she and her husband now run a cattle and crops operation near Kyle, Sask. and she is also the co-owner of Bella Spur Innovative Media Inc.

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JAMIE-RAE PITTMAN

"I think the most valuable aspect to the CYL program is the relationships that are being developed," says Pittman.

"You cannot put a price on a network. By injecting youth into some of these networks through connections with mentors, we are ensuring them a place in the future."

Applications for the CYL program are open until Jan. 21 at www.cattlemensyoungleaders.com. For more information, contact program co-ordinator Jolene Noble at 403-275-8558 or noblej@cattle.ca.