

# Watching and LEARNING

*Angus breeders balance kid work and cow work.*

*by Miranda Reiman, director of digital content and strategy*

Not that long ago, if you were driving down U.S. Highway 35 near Economy, Ind., around chore time, you might find Lindsay Sankey walking across their farmyard, balancing a feed bucket in each hand with a young Caroline or Cyrus strapped in a Baby Bjorn.

“These kids have been on the farm with their little feet hanging four feet off the ground since the month they were born,” Sankey says. “They’ve always been integrated into the farm, and I don’t think that they’ll ever want to be part of this if you don’t include them early.”

In her home state, Sankey and her husband, Cody, are raising their kids and Angus cattle alongside each other while working full-time jobs, too. Cody can often be found on the road for Genex, and Lindsay is a marketing specialist for Co-Alliance Cooperative. She splits time between working from a home office and the main office in Indianapolis a few days a week.

“We have this thing between the two of us, and it’s our code: teamwork makes the dream work,” she says, admitting it’s a bit cliché but absolutely true.

From raising replacement heifers to a freezer beef program that’s tripled in sales in the last few years, the family has a lot going on. Today, Caroline is 6 and Cyrus is 4, adding another layer of complexity to Sankey Angus.

“We are in the limbo stage right now, learning how to balance the school calendar with the work we do. I totally understand why some parents homeschool,” Sankey says.





PHOTO BY CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF, COURTESY OF AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

Two Outlook calendars, the school schedule and a giant white board help them stay organized.

“We find the windows in Cody’s travel where there are days we commit to cow work, which allows him to be there and me to help,” she says.

Breeding, weaning, vaccination, getting cows to grass and picture day all fall on that list.

“There’s a lot of balancing here, and some times are better than others,” Sankey laughs.

There are probably a good number of American Angus Association members across the United States who can feel the truth in that quote. There’s not an official count of breeders balancing kids and cows, but it’s safe to say the Sankey story is repeated on countless farms and ranches in all corners of the country.

### “Little helpers” become good help

Near Bern, Kan., Neal and Marya Haverkamp have seen the progression of kids and ranch work, as their four children have grown from willing observers to full-on handy help at their Nemaha Valley Cattle.

“When they were little, it wouldn’t be unheard of for me to have the toddler running around our ankles, have a baby on my hip and have the little one in the car seat by the chuteside,” Marya says. “Or checking cattle, we would strap the car seat into the front of the Ranger, put two of them on the back with the dog and one on my lap and we would just go that way.”

A decade later, those times have become memories captured in favorite photographs and stories worth retelling.

*Continued on page 28*



## How-Tos from Those Who Got To

No matter how many social media pictures or ad campaigns feature the joys of raising a family on a ranch, anyone who is living it knows it's also a lot of work. Here are a few tried-and-true tips from those in the trenches:

**P**ack them up. Whether it was a front carrier or a big cargo wagon, the Sankey kids spent a lot of time hauled around the farm in a way that worked for all parties.

"I could pull it anywhere, and it was big enough they both could lay down in it," Lindsay Sankey says. "You'd stock it up with snacks and sunblock and never a phone or anything, because there's enough in front of them to keep them occupied."

**Pro tip:** beef jerky, cheese sticks and the cheap freeze pops are among their favorite farm foods.

**D**evelop a safe spot. No matter which farm location they're at, the Sankeys have a designated "safe spot" the kids will go to if an animal gets unruly or a piece of large machinery is coming through.

"I created it to be the best seat in the house, a safe area designated so they're not going to miss the action, but they'll miss the danger, and sometimes their little legs appreciate it," Sankey explains.

**B**e flexible. If it's wintry weather, Sankey says her children rarely complain. They get their gear on to "go to war." But recently Sankey's in-laws bought the family a set of long-range walkie talkies, so if weather conditions are bad enough, the kids can stay in the house and communicate with Sankey while she does chores.

"Do I need to teach them anything fundamental right now that they need to come out?" she asks herself. If not, that's a way she can keep tabs on the house and the barn at the same time.

**E**xercise patience. "Don't sweat the small stuff," Marya Haverkamp says. Even if a youngster isn't doing something perfectly she points out, "At least they're doing it. They're doing, and they're learning. You just want to get it done, but take a breath, take a step back and let them learn. There's been people before you that have done it, and just keep going. The days are long, but the years are short, and try to find yourself in the moment and find what's good about it," Haverkamp advises.

That, and don't worry: someday the house will be clean. For now, the lived-in look is "in."



Caroline, Lindsay, Cyrus and Cody Sankey

"Time moves on and they grow up," Haverkamp says. Those kids — Dane (17), Addie (15), Sullivan (13) and Ian (10) — now have specific roles with the herd.

"They all get up in the morning and do their chores, but Dane does pretty much all the feeding. I'm not going to lie, we just have to write down what the mix is or the ration if we change it, and he just goes and does it, and he does it happily," she says.

Addie is the master of the show cattle, horses and the sick pen, and Sullivan manages the freezer beef cattle and is the hot wire expert. Ian often tags along with his parents or fills in where needed.

"I'm not going to sugarcoat it. Sometimes Neal goes his way and I go mine, and we're doing our thing on the ranch and getting things done, and I don't always see what he lets everybody do," Haverkamp says noting Dad may give them more responsibility than her mama heart is ready to handle. "We never had a set age when something was OK. It's just when we felt like each of them was ready. Believe me, they all have evolved at their own pace."

Intense days, where the supper-to-bedtime routine included signing homework folders and practicing spelling words, are now filled with more after-school and evening activities. Sports and FFA take up bigger chunks of the calendar.

"We just make it work," Haverkamp says. "If they



Sullivan, Addie, Ian and  
Dane Haverkamp



have another thing they love to do, another passion or whatever it is, we don't feel like they should have to miss that because they have to be on the ranch working. We try to have a nice balance."

She has been a high school ag teacher and FFA advisor for the last 17 years, so that's one more set of conflicting demands to figure in. Of course, that means planning the "all hands on deck" to-do list items, such as freeze-branding or pasture burning, for days when everyone can indeed help.

The oldest kids could competently back up a trailer before they even had their full licenses. Recently those same Haverkamps poured bulls while Neal and Marya were gone to another activity. They make their own artificial insemination (AI) decisions on their 4-H calves and choose marketing avenues for their commercial cattle.

These are the days when Haverkamp sees all the time hauling her children along as little kids worked out like they'd planned.

"I wouldn't trade it, but it was stressful," she says, noting anybody going through it right now ought to take heart — the payoff is ahead.

Dane has his own custom haying business, will be a senior in the fall and is looking at what's next. He's almost grown.

It's at this stage, Haverkamp says, "You realize you might have raised a good person."

## Worth the reward

Back in Indiana, Sankey is looking forward to the tasks her young children will master.

"Once Cyrus is old enough to operate the skid steer or the tractor, I will happily turn that over to him," Sankey says. "He's such a mechanically minded little boy. He just wants to learn how everything works."

Today, the kids will check ears, pitch hay or fill buckets. She sees signs they'll someday be an unstoppable team.

"Caroline is very much the animal person in the family,

so we joke that when it's time for them to go show at junior nationals, Cyrus will drive," Sankey says. "He'll get her anywhere she wants to go, and she will be the one at the end of the halter because that's what she enjoys doing."

Growing up together, working alongside each other, that's been the goal.

To see it playing out in real life is rewarding, the women say.

"It's about legacy; to be sure that God-willing, more than one of them is going to want everything we've worked our tails off for," Haverkamp says. "There was never any question that we would take them with us and they would learn. Even if one day they decide that's not their cup of tea, at least we've given them the foundation or the wings they that they can fly, but the roots they can come back here if they want to."

All the moments add up, she says.

"I hope that they have good memories, that we've made memories, not just all the hard work," Haverkamp says. "I hope they feel like there's no better way we could have raised them."

When they're adults with families of their own, Sankey hopes her kids look back and say: "Mom and Dad cared enough to include us."

"It's so easy to set your kids in front of a screen or leave them in the cab of a truck with an iPhone or something and not include them, but I want them to say, 'They took us everywhere. They didn't leave us out of the hard days or the fun days.'"

That's how the cycle continues. **AJ**

