

Bryan: Back here for another edition of the Meat Speak podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand. With us, although Chef Tony is running a little bit late, he will be here as soon as his schedule permits, but we didn't want to hold up the show because we have a very special guest in studio today, somebody who I met many, many years ago as a youth soccer coach.

Mark: Wow.

Bryan: Yeah.

Mark: Wow.

Bryan: Yeah. You know-

Mark: I hope you're not going to tell stories.

Bryan: Oh, well-

Mark: Was I that parent?

Bryan: Well, no, no, not at all. You know, it's one of those things. Every youth soccer coach, I think, starts out with this aspiration of someday I want to be the CEO of this, right.? And I'll be darned if you didn't get there, right? If you didn't finish that dream off. With us here today is Mr. Mark McCully, chief executive officer of the American Angus Association. That means he's the chief. Sir, thank you so much for joining us today.

Mark: Hey Bryan. It's great to be here. Thank you.

Bryan: Man, we're so glad you could come in. So those of you who don't know the background of Mr. McCully, which some of you do, some of you don't, Mark actually comes to the American Angus Association just fairly recently, hired in June of 2019, this year. But before that you were in these hallowed halls of premium beef for, gosh, more than-

Mark: Almost 20 years.

Bryan: Two decades. Yeah. Almost two decades.

Mark: Almost 20 years, yeah.

Bryan: So can you walk us through a little bit about, first, your background and the path that you took to get to where you're at.

Mark: Yeah, you bet. No, so I'm a farm kid. I grew up on a farm in central Illinois and just always loved the farming side of things, but especially loved the cattle. And that is what-

Bryan: Oh.

Mark: Oh my goodness.

Bryan: Speaking of cattle, Chef Tony just showed up.

Mark: Brother Tony.

Tony: Mark, it's so great to see you again, and I've got to tell you, I'm concerned. Since you've left Certified Angus Beef, I think you've dropped 50 pounds and I don't think you're eating. You know what, when you were here you never missed a meal. And so we have a beautiful breakfast here a Certified Angus Beef prime ribeye.

Mark: Oh, my goodness.

Tony: We have a beautiful poached egg and sauteed mushrooms for you. Here's a napkin. Eat at your leisure. I'm really concerned you're not having enough Kansas City barbecue where you are.

Mark: Oh, man. This is just beautiful. It is true that in St. Joseph, Missouri at the American Angus Association headquarters, we do not have a culinary center, nor do we have a Chef Tony that keeps me fed like you did.

Tony: And this is the reason. This is the reason, Mark. Wow, it's so good to see you.

Mark: I'll be back every Monday.

Bryan: Yeah. Well how's the food in Missouri?

Mark: Is it good.

Bryan: Have you found your favorite barbecue place yet?

Mark: There are some great barbecue, of course, in Kansas city. St. Joseph is North there of Kansas City, about 45 minutes. So I don't get down there quite as often as I'd like to. But been traveling a lot so far in the new role, so I'm not a local quite yet, so I don't know all the places. But we're searching them out and finding some great Certified Angus Beef brisket in a few places. And I will be a frequent consumer for sure.

Tony: Oh man, you're a good man. We love to have you on this show.

Bryan: You know for those of you, because I know this is an audio medium. There is a giant-

Mark: I could chew into the microphone but that would probably not be good.

Tony: Why don't you cut into that egg so it's kind of [crosstalk 00:03:35]. That egg yolk. It's hot. I just ran it over here from the kitchen. You just, you've got to eat this. I mean-

Mark: This is nuts.

Tony: This is special. This is your roasting because we never got to roast you before you left, actually. You just kind of left. And I'm sorry I didn't cube this up. I know this is your pet peeve. You want cubes. This, I've heard about this.

Mark: So you heard the story, huh?

Tony: Yeah. Tell the story to our-

Mark: So chef Peter, we just came off the Angus Association's convention, which we had out in Reno, and we had some great Certified Angus Beef there and we had some reception, some in the trade show where the ranchers were coming around and chef Peter was serving up some awesome food. Well, I'm standing there and it's a kind of reception so it's kind of a standup kind of deal. And so we're talking a lot and so I talked Chef Peter into just carbon off a bunch of spinalis for me and then cubing it for me and putting it on my plate so I could just stand there. I didn't even have to cut. I just sat there and ate cubes of spinalis for like a half hour and about [inaudible 00:04:36] myself.

Tony: For those that don't know who spinalis is, that is the beautiful top cap of the ribeye, ladies and gentlemen, for our viewers overseas. That is the beautiful top, moist, delicate piece of meat on top of the ribeye. You can separate that and do lots of things like Mark said.

Bryan: Spinalis is the Greek god of beef cuts.

Tony: The Greek god. How is that steak?

Mark: This is awesome. Sorry for those of you listening to me chew. That's bad. But I have to because this is awesome.

Bryan: I mean, this is your standard hotel breakfast. It's a [crosstalk 00:05:11].

Tony: This is the Ritz Carlton Grand Cayman breakfast here, you know. Steak and eggs.

Mark: Oh, this is nuts.

Bryan: So-

Mark: Oh, you're going to ask me to talk again. Okay, go ahead.

Bryan: You know, I think for the rest, we'll just go ahead and say for the rest of the episode, for those of you who enjoy the sound of people talking with their mouth full while chewing, this is for you. This is for you. So you grew up on a farm. You were a farm kid. You know, we get to have a lot of interesting people on this, from chefs to pit masters to meat scientists to culinary school directors to... Gosh, who did we have a couple of weeks ago? I mean, yeah, we had the master distiller of Jack Daniels. And so it's always this interesting question of how did you get to here, right?

Mark: Yeah.

Bryan: But you started on a farm, but you didn't go straight from the farm to being the chief of the largest breed association in the world.

Mark: No. Well, and I did fall in love. I fell in love with the cattle and I always wanted to make a career out of that. And that was my passion. I knew to follow my passion. It was a small family outfit, so there really wasn't a lot to go back to without taking on a bunch of debt. So I went off to school, studied animal science and continued on with the postgraduate degree, but just trying to find a career path in cattle and had some wonderful opportunities. It's a small world and knew some folks that worked at Certified Angus Beef. I was working at another place and swung in here and had some visits and fell in love with Certified Angus Beef and it turned out I was on a little bit of a job interview and I actually didn't even know it that day.

Mark: And they said, "Well, do you want a job?" And I said, "Well, I'm not really looking for a job." And I went home and then I called him back up and said, "Hey, can we do that again?" And a little bit after that had the opportunity to start here and then got the incredible opportunity here at Certified Angus Beef for 19 years. I say I've been in the Angus family for a long, long time. The American Angus Association, which are our parent company of the brand, I'd worked with the association for some time and so it was kind of a logical evolution for me to move over to the Association. So.

Tony: Are you sure, Mark, you sure it wasn't the statement, "It's all you can eat beef here?" That's why you took the job?

Mark: Oh, see we didn't have a culinary center. We didn't have a Chef Tony when I first started here. So it was hard to leave. I promise you this place is, it was hard to not be able to come into every day. Yeah.

Bryan: Can you talk about the Association and what it is, because I think people hear about it. I don't know that everybody understands. I mean, I guess the easiest way to put it, it's the breed registry. It's the AKC of black-hided cattle, right?

Mark: Yeah. Yeah. It is kind of complicated if you're not in that business all the time, but to breed great cattle, and registered Angus cattle, there's an awful lot of science that goes into it. There's an awful lot of data. There's knowing the pedigrees. But in this day and age now, we actually use genomics to better understand the genetics of that animal, to be able to breed better cattle. And that's why we have the percent Certified Angus Beef acceptance as we do today, and the percent Prime that we have to do today, because the breed Association's built tools for cattlemen to be more successful and to make better cattle in the process and to sustain their livelihood. And that's really what the Association is really about. We have about 25,000 members spread out across the country. We registered about 300,000 purebred registered animals, new, into the registry just last year. So it's continuing to grow. We also have, Certified Angus Beef is the largest, by far, subsidiary of the Association. We also have a foundation.

Mark: We have a foundation, a 501(c)(3), that gives hundreds of thousands in youth scholarships every year to support young people pursuing their passions and their career in agriculture. We have a company called Angus Genetics Incorporated, which builds these genetic evaluation tools for ranchers. And we also have a company called Angus Media, which publishes a couple of magazines. We also do a TV show, all focused on helping our members and helping the cattlemen be more successful.

Bryan: Yeah. It's funny you said the TV show, because I remember I grew up on a dairy farm.

Mark: I'm sorry.

Bryan: The cows never stay milked, right? But I remember, so because I grew up on a dairy farm in the middle of nowhere in Ohio, we only had an antenna on a television. I remember the day we got a dish. I think it was Dish Network. And you get this glut of channels and I only knew like 15 of them, of course. You know, the big ones, the CNNs, the ESPNs, the locals. And then at the bottom there was this RFD TV, and there were always these TV shows and they were always dedicated to farming. Those of you who have walked that walk that I just described, that's the TV show that he's talking about. Not necessarily RFD TV, but Angus Productions. Angus Media does shows on there, correct?

Mark: Yeah. Yeah. And we're actually right in the middle of a transition and RFD has been a great media for us. They've done an incredible job of getting the Angus reports out to our audience, but we're going to continue to evolve and look at more streaming platforms. So you can go on Angus TV on YouTube if you want to see more about what we're doing out there. But it's really, again, it is a media dedicated towards cattlemen to help them better understand the tools that are available to them, hear from other cattlemen across the country of what's being successful in their farms and ranches and yeah, it's a great tool to have.

Bryan: Excellent. You know, I think there's this idea of, and especially as you get closer to larger metropolitan areas of what constitutes the classic farmer. I think there's this idea that, you know, overalls and a straw at the mouth and the reality of what goes on the farm.... And I pose this question you because, I mean, you spend a lot of your time traveling across middle America, meeting the farmers, meeting the people behind this. The old-timey stereotypical idea of what a farmer is, I mean, we're talking about people who are like mechanical engineers now. We're talking about really, really incredibly intelligent, innovative people, right? Can you talk about some of the things that are going on on the farm now?

Mark: You know, I like to describe it as, we still have these time honored traditions in agriculture. It is still a very traditional business. It's about families. It's about taking care of the land, taking care of the animals. But we just do it with different techniques. And I think we're blending those time honored traditions and stockmanship skills that folks have been taught from one generation to the next. But now we're layering in, I mentioned genomics earlier, we're layering in things in agriculture. We call it precision agriculture, to where we're using GPS, where we're using drones now, where we're using tools. And think about what some of these things can be. Not only can we breed

better animals, but we can better utilize our resources if we're able to use virtual fencing. So basically you think about a fence for your dog.

Mark: This would be a virtual fence that you could move across the pastures to better utilize the forages, making sure you don't overgraze a particular area. There's all sorts of great technologies that are coming about, just allowing the farmers to do more with less. Use less pesticides, herbicides, be more environmentally friendly, be more sustainable, so there are some incredible technologies. But as you say, it's not guys out there. I mean, you've got to have some degrees. You've got to have some technical skills, because it is a high tech world.

Bryan: Yeah. You know, Tony, as you look at, from a culinary side of things, I'm going to ask you to rewind and-

Mark: Yeah, let Tony talk so I can take another bite.

Bryan: You know, as you look at it from a chef's perspective and kind of rewind before the past five years, when obviously you've been here, when you've had all the highly marbled beef at your fingertips you could ever imagine. Your history as a chef, what did you use to do to guarantee that when I order in beef, whether it's for the King and Queen of Jordan, whether it's in the Middle East, whether it's here state side at a steak house in Buffalo, New York, what were some of the steps that you used to have to take to make sure that the product that you were getting in was what you were expecting?

Tony: Well, you know, thank you for sharing where you guys were brought up in the farmlands. I was brought up on a lobster trap, okay? Just so you both know, in New England. So I'm a seafood guy. So for the last six years, myself being here at Certified Angus Beef has just been an incredible educational experience. And basically I have used my 30, 40 years, I'm giving my age away, culinary-wise to bring the brand to that next level with our team. We've got a sensational team. But to Bryan's question, what I would do is, I always believe in having the finest quality products in my kitchen. And if I've got a general manager and a F & B that are always looking for penny pinching and that bottom line, I think, and I know you chefs know this, you live and die by your food costs.

Tony: And I got it. You have to, right? But at the same time, if you're going to prepare, you're going to have that quality of product, you have to stand behind it. And that's what I did with Certified Angus Beef my whole life. And I love wagyu. I am not going to lie to you. I love it. And I think a lot of folks use it and it's coming to America. It has already.

Tony: But I'm a firm believer of having the best products, giving that right price for those products, because I'm going to tell you something, if you don't have the quality products, nobody's going to visit your restaurant. There's so much competition right now. There's so many restaurants, there's so many different chefs now, and I can see that they are using quality products. Look at Certified Angus Beef. We have grown in the last six, seven years. So folks know our quality, they know the taste and they know the consistency. I'm not going to name the hamburger chain, but you can go to the

Philippines and have the same double cheeseburger you can in Chicago, Illinois. And I stand behind that.

Bryan: Well said. Well said. You know, Mark, can you talk about, as somebody who spends a lot of time on the farm, of course it's, having an agricultural background my father used to say, you should always be a little careful when you get a little extra money in the bank account because that's a sure sign that something's about to break. On the farm, it is a constant battle of not just the day to day grind but, but there's always an element of putting out fires, be they figurative or literal, really. But can you talk about some of the biggest issues that are being faced on the farm today?

Mark: Yeah. And I'll tell you what, this year, 2019, has been, you can talk... and I was literally just in North Dakota yesterday and met with a whole bunch of cattlemen there and we had a meeting up in Bismarck. And I'm sitting there listening to these ranchers that have been in the business, these are gentlemen that are 70, 75 years old saying this has been the toughest year they've ever had. And in agriculture, and growing up in agriculture, I was always so frustrated with dad. All he ever talked about was the weather. And I didn't understand why would we always talk about the weather. Well, I understand. In agriculture the weather, mother nature dictates whether you have a good year or a bad year. And in a lot of ways, mother nature dictates whether you get to keep your farm or your ranch.

Mark: And it is tough and it is stressful because those are things obviously out of your control. And so if you're around a farmer or rancher or long, you know that they're on their weather app about 23 hours out of the day trying to understand, are they going to get enough rain? Are they going to get too much rain? And what are the temperatures going to be? You know, you take this year. We had the polar vortex that came through the Midwest. I talked to these ranchers, they were out calving cows when it's 20 and 30 below zero. They're out there 24 hours a day, literally. Guys talk about sleeping in their tractors, trucks, barns out there with these calves to make sure that they survive and get through those conditions. And then we roll into the spring where we had the incredible rains and the floods throughout so much of the Midwest, folks that weren't able to get their crops in, not able to get their hay put up.

Mark: And so they're looking at escalated costs on feeds throughout the winter. Then even some spots it turned really dry and then now, they had some big snows up and early snows on top of these late crops. It's just one thing after another. We were out in Reno, I was talking about Reno. Some good friends over in California fighting fires literally lost homes and barns through those wildfires. And I think a lot of times in everyday America, weather is a bit of a nuisance, right? If it's a rainy day, we don't get to go to the ballgame or it's snowy, it might be a little slippery on our drive into work. But you think about that weather, I guess that would be my challenge to everybody in our food industry. When we-

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Mark: ... about that weather. I guess, that would be my challenge to everybody in our food industry. When we come into these tough weather conditions. Think about the farmers

and ranchers that are out there dealing with it, making sure that they're growing their crops and raising their cattle and their livestock, taking care of them and that to make sure that we have the most wonderful, safest, most affordable food supply in the world.

Bryan: Well said. Well said. We're going to take a quick break. Mark, if you would stay with us, if you would consider for the last second-

Mark: I got more steak to eat.

Bryan: Perfect. Well, I'll tell you what. You tear into that. We're going to take a break. We are going to sit down for a chat with our friend and your friend as well, Mr. Troy [Hadrack 00:19:37]-

Mark: Absolutely.

Bryan: From South Dakota who is a rancher who has just a plethora of stories to better showcase what it is that happens on the ranch and truly as a consumer myself, why we should all be thankful for the folks spending their days raising our food. So Mr. [McCauley 00:00:54], we'll be back in a few. Thank you.

Bryan: Back here on the [inaudible 00:20:02] podcast, Brian [Schuff 00:01:03]. Joining me all the way from the far reaches of North Central, South Dakota is Mr. Troy Hadrack. Troy, I was going to give you a little bit more of an intro, but there's a whole lot about you and your operation that I don't know that I could do it justice. Earlier in this episode we had Mark McCauley on and he talked about how every farm, every ranch that he gets to visit, they've all got their own individual unique stories. Can you talk to us a little bit about, or paint the picture to what you and your wife, Stacy, get to work on that piece of property up there in South Dakota every day. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Troy: Sure. Well, we are fifth generation on the place. Grew up here with my dad and my uncle farming and ranching here. And they had my grandparents living on the place. And then back in 2012 two of my cousins that I grew up with and I were able to come together with my dad and my uncle and kind of take over as the next generation, and they were looking at retirement. And so anyhow, so we're pretty excited that we get to be here. And one of the cool things that was able to do, as a group, I guess, when we were able to take over, is it just kind of gives you a chance to kind of reflect and think about where you've been, think about where you want to go.

Troy: And so I spent a lot of time with that and one of my primary duties is managing the cow herd. And so we looked at all those types of things and it's ... and I often tell people, it takes generations of wisdom to really understand how to work the land, and run cows, and do the right things, and all those things that you'll never learn in a book. But you just have to kind of have that instinct, I guess, around livestock. And we were able to kind of blend some of that with some great cutting edge technology that we have available in the industry today.

Troy: And our main goal at that point then was to make cattle that graded, that qualified for certified Angus beef that become more valuable. And we've come a long way and we're pretty excited that we can be a part of this brand and play a role in what this really cool thing, where we've got these cows that are out here in the middle of South Dakota and spend their summers out on the prairie and spend their winters, some usually behind a wind break somewhere. But, we can take that and turn it into something that's just incredibly delicious and very nutritious and it's a neat thing to be a part of.

Bryan: Yeah. I grew up on a dairy farm here in Ohio. And one of the things about Ohio is, it's one of those things, if you like four seasons, you get four seasons, but you never have to deal with extreme stuff. Summer is hot, but not that hot. Winter's cold, but not that cold. Where you're at, farming, ranching takes on a whole new definition it seems like. Can you talk a little bit about, I mean, what is it like to have a ranch in South Dakota? I mean, when I think of the winters, I mean, when you think of the places that ... man, when it's January, February, I'm not looking to book a flight to Pierre or if you go a little farther North up into North Dakota to Bismark or anywhere like that.

Troy: Yeah. Not exactly one of your winter destinations always, I get it. As troubling, or maybe as difficult as sometimes the weather can be, it's an incredible place to grow up. I mean, I live .. for me to go grab a Starbucks coffee, I'd have to drive almost 70 miles. To go to a Walmart or a McDonald's, same type of thing. So I would say we probably grew up a little bit unique out here and you learn to be a little bit self ... take self care, I guess. But I love it. I mean, the idea that you get to kind of work with that weather every day and work with the cows every day is pretty amazing.

Troy: And yeah, mother nature just does her darndest to kick us out of here. And I swear some days she hates us, but that's part of it. And it's one of the reasons, honestly, that probably keeps us as rural as we are, which isn't a bad thing. But you learn how to do it. And I guess that's always the good thing is ... yeah, the winters get pretty cold. I mean, it's pretty common for us in the winter time to see some 30 below type temperatures and wind chills, obviously, even worse than that. Even today, it's only a high of 11. And so it's already fairly chilly here for this time of year.

Bryan: And this is ... just so everybody is aware, this is November 11th.

Troy: Yeah. November 11th. Yeah. Yeah, we actually had our first below zero temperature. We hit below zero a few days ago actually. So, yeah. So we're already dealing with that weather and felt like we dealt with tough weather all last winter and all summer. It just kind of feels like it hasn't quit, but yeah. You know what? I mean, it's hard to describe. You think, "Why would somebody want to put up with that stuff?"

Troy: But I just sit here and think that we are pretty lucky, cause I get to live on the place where I work, I get to work with my kids. They get to grow up knowing what the generations that have worked before them. And it's a pretty unique situation. There's no doubt. And so we're doing our best to stay out here. We're doing our best to not dwell on the past, but learn from learn from the past and try and continue to blaze new trails into the future. And my wife and I, we're very fortunate to get to do that.

Bryan: It's funny that ... you've mentioned the weather and mother nature. It's funny, it's this thing where ranchers, I mean, what's the number one thing every rancher talks about first? It's the weather, of course. Right? And I think a lot of people ... certainly it's something that Mr. McCauley had spoke on as well. You guys really are at the whim of mother nature and 2019 has not particularly been all that pleasant of a year, I guess in [crosstalk 00:26:30]-

Troy: No.

Bryan: Can you talk about some of the struggles that you guys have been up against this year? Because if there's one thing that that is predictable, it's that the weather's always going to be unpredictable year to year.

Troy: Yeah. I mean, this whole decade has been quite a challenge. I mean, honestly we started out, we had a lot of years of drought and a lot of years we had cold winters, but they were open winters, we couldn't catch any moisture, we couldn't run any water in the spring. Just really struggled to get rain. And I can tell you when the switch flipped, it was December 26th of 2018. We got a pretty good snow storm the day after Christmas and really just kind of set in and the rest of the winter was tough. We had a big pretty tough blizzard in March and kind of got through that and got rid of some snow after that. And then three weeks later into April got another one that we had 30 inches of snow. Just was about to our wit's end. I mean, that was a tough one.

Troy: Couldn't get to some of our cattle for several days. And it just, I mean, it was just really hard. And it gets a little bit nerve wrecking and not just the cattle, but the whole family's out there, my kids and my wife, and you're doing all these things trying to do whatever you can to keep these cattle alive and survive the storms. And we had to sit down with the kids and they're old enough to know better, but you still kind of have to have this reminder. And probably as much a reminder for myself too is that you get in weather like this, we can't get to a hospital. There is no dialing 911. So if you fall down and break your arm, we're going to have to figure out how to take care of it at home here, cause the roads are completely blocked.

Troy: They're going to be blocked for several days and that's the way it is. And so, as much as we have to be out there taking care of those cattle all that time, then you got to make sure that you take care of yourself first or you're not going to be any help. [crosstalk 00:28:25] So, we get through that and then we have a pretty tough ... Spring's really wet. It quit snowing, but it kept raining and just kind of been a challenge all through the summer. I mean, we've had ... typically we're about an 18 inch rainfall area for the year. This year we've had 30 inches of rain on top of the 80 inches of snow that we had last winter.

Troy: And so all of a sudden every slough, and creek, and dam is full of water and it's trying to find new places to go. So yeah, all of a sudden we got plenty of moisture and you think, "Well, we're going to have a good hay year. It's going to be a lot different than the drought." Well then, a lot of our hay grounds are flooded out, can't get to them. And so yeah, the challenges just continue to pile up. So it's not unexpected, but yeah, it's kind of like nothing's been easy in 2019 and it just stayed on that track so far.

Bryan: Yeah. Well, we do hope that means that 2020 is going to ... everything's going to go your way, right? You're due, if nothing else, right?

Troy: Yeah. We'd like to think we're due.

Bryan: When you look at it and you talk about the snow and the cold and everything, I don't know that as our country, as the world evolves and transforms and people get closer and closer to a lot of those, the large metropolitan areas and farther and farther away from the farm, and understanding kind of where their food comes from, and what goes into it. Can you talk about that? In the snow, it's ... you talked about taking care of your kids as well, but man, it's not like y'all get to just stay hold up in the house drinking hot cocoa when the weather is up there. I mean, you have to go out in pretty treacherous ... and I've heard stories of ranchers sleeping in their tractors, in their cabs to ... making sure that their animals are okay in that stuff.

Troy: Yeah. Yeah. The worse the weather, typically the more time we're going to have to spend with them. The days where you don't have to worry about your cattle are the days when it's nice, essentially. So yeah, it's a huge commitment. This spring we were calving and the blizzards were coming through and just kind of wouldn't let up. We were out there. I mean, I figured we had less than 45 minutes if a calf was born and we weren't there to save its life, and it's probably maybe even half of that. So you have to be right there. And I know a lot of people say, "Well, why don't you put them in a barn?" You get that question a lot, or I do. And the answer to that is, one, to have barns big enough to put all of your cows in would be quite expensive.

Troy: I mean, a cow takes up a fair amount of space, just one cow. And you start multiplying that and then you're having calves. And the logistics of that is another thing. And the other part of that is too, you put cow ... just imagine putting yourself, when you're standing in a greenhouse, say how it feels inside of a greenhouse compared to outside, and all of a sudden you have some huge condensation issues and [inaudible 00:31:27] and the cattle are ... maybe they're out of the wind and out of the snow, but you're going to have a lot of condensation. The amount of water vapor that comes out of the lungs of one cow is pretty extensive. And so now it's going to be raining inside of your barn, so your cows are going to be cold and wet.

Troy: And so there's a lot of things that go into this that you kind of have to think about. But yeah, so we're out there a lot and when we're in those blizzards and a calf would be born, we were out there ... pretty much the only way you could get through was with a four wheel drive tractor. We had a loader on the front and I'd have the kids or my wife in the loader bucket. And them trying to direct me as I was driving and a calf would be born and we would literally just grab the calf, write down who the cow was and we'd get it into the house and start getting it warmed up. And we did that for a couple of days and then when it finally broke, we were able to go out and we had to go gather those cows up and convince them that ... they didn't have any bonding time with that calf, and now we have to convince them that, "Yeah, remember two days ago when that happened, here he is."

Troy: And they're not really keen on that. At this point, they're like, "Well yeah, that ship has sailed and they're onto the next thing." And so just to save their life was a huge chore. And then for him to mother back up and be able to have somebody have a cow raise him was the next step. Yeah, it just never ends. So I often joke, but it's the truth, for a ranch kid, when you wake up in the morning and see that school has been called off for weather, that's like your worst nightmare, right?

Troy: Because now the next thing means, that means you're getting dressed and you're getting your butt outside. You don't get to sit in school all day. You're going to be out there doing whatever needs to be done and it's going to be from ... it could be for the next 24 hours. So our kids know all too well when we get the notification if school's late or getting called off, what the rest of their day is going to look like. And fortunately, they really love these cows too. And they know the work it takes and they're willing to help.

Bryan: Talking about the kids. You and Stacy have three?

Troy: Yes. A boy and two girls. Yep.

Bryan: Excellent. Now, given your roots, given where you've come from and where you've been, and a lot of people certainly outside of the ranching world, would look it and say, "Man, what is it that makes you want to keep at it?" I mean, it's a lot of work. It's uncomfortable. It's a difficult life. It's not all glitz and glam all the time, right? What is it that keeps you rooted there? And honestly, knowing how the ranching families work, knowing the whole industry, that more than likely your kids are going to follow that path as well. What is it? Can you put your finger on it that is so attractive about that lifestyle? Because there are a lot of folks, honestly, we meet a lot of chefs who've never even seen a live cow before.

Troy: Right. You know what? Sometimes it's hard to put your finger on it. But I remember growing up and getting into junior high and high school and just really being drawn to those cows. I wanted to know what made a cow tick. What's going on inside of her? What's going on inside of her head and what's going inside of her [inaudible 00:15:48]? And how do we change this grass that's grown out here in my pasture into this incredibly delicious human consumable protein? And the process just fascinates me. I mean, we've got the ultimate in up-cycling when you own a cow going on out here.

Troy: And I think that and the history, I mean, hearing my grandpa talk about growing up, and training horses, and running cows, and some of the heartaches, and joys that they got to experience and to know that I get to walk on that same dirt as my grandparents and my great grandparents and literally these cows that I have today are the descendants of those cows that my grandparents and great grandparents owned and the decisions that they've made. And so, the opportunity to build on family history, to build on family legacy. Sometimes it's proving people wrong, to ... they say most family businesses don't last past the second generation. And here we are in generation number four on the ranch, five in the United States.

Troy: And part of me says, "My parents and my grandparents and great grandparents, they just worked way too hard for all those years for me to kind of screw this thing up now." And it's not that I'm obligated to be here, I don't feel obligated to be here, but I want to be here and I want to build on that hard work. And every ranching family, farming family, I think they all ... y'all in the back of your head, you hope your kids, at least one of them would be interested in coming back and kind of getting to roll over to that next generation one more time. But you do have to love it. And we talk with our kids a lot about that. If you don't like this, and I understand, not everybody likes hard work.

Bryan: And I'm not saying I like working that hard either the way the last year's been, but that's part of the deal. And if you can't find some joy in some of that hard work or see that benefit, when we get to meet those chefs and see how excited they are to get to use the certified Angus beef products that we raise and that we're working that hard to make, that's what makes it worth it. And so you hang onto those things, you look forward to those things and building those relationships. And so, that's how we've tried to frame it to our kids and they will be under no obligation to come home, but I hope they do.

Troy: And you can see ... and each of them have their own natural talents. And especially around cows, some people kind of can read a cow and some people can't. And I'm really fortunate that my kids ... I can see that in them, that they've got kind of that natural instinct on how to deal with livestock.

Bryan: Excellent. How do you guys manage getting off the ranch? I know you've been with us at Black Barn in New York City for the barn painting at Trowbridge Angus. You were with us, what, a month and a half ago down in Asheville, North Carolina?

Bryan: Yeah.

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Bryan: ... a month and a half ago down in Asheville, North Carolina. What does it take for you guys? Because I think back to my father. I think in 18 years of my life, I think we went on one family vacation together. The cows didn't stay milked. What are the hoops that you guys have to jump through even to even think about getting on a plane to go somewhere for a couple of days?

Troy: Yeah. You got to do some coordinating, and besides the cows, it's school activities that the kids are involved and everything else, how's Teagan getting here and how's Olivia getting there, and where's where Reese going to end up at the end of the day and all those things, and you've got to kind of get that all worked out. But we're very fortunate. We live in the same yard as my parents, so they're right next door here and they're always willing to help. And yeah, there's a lot of times it's like, "Boy, that'd be fun to go to," or, "We'd love to be there," and then the answer creeps into the back of your head of, "Yeah, but we have cows." And you kind of joke about it, but it's not necessarily a joke, and so it is hard to get away.

Troy: You have to be disciplined to do it, though. I don't think it does any of us any good to get past the end of your mailbox for a year at a time. You need to get out. And honestly, it makes us a better rancher and it makes us better business people. I need to get out and talk to other people and learn from them and see what we can do differently on our own operation. And so from a business aspect, you really have to treat it that way. Yes, the cows need to be taken care of, so you got to have that lined up and make sure somebody's doing that.

Troy: But that's important, too. And it's important to be active in your industry. I want to know if there's anything I can be doing better to help these chefs when they're using our certified Angus beef product. And that to me makes me want to get home and get back to work. And so you got to balance it. We can't take off for six weeks. Sometimes it's like, "All right. Well, if we leave right now we've got 48 hours, and we can buzz out and be back." And we try and be cognizant of that. But yeah, sometimes it's a challenge. There's no doubt.

Bryan: We work with a lot of chefs who are almost to a person. Every chef is completely enamored and fascinated with what goes on back at the ranch. And so anytime they get an opportunity to come visit, to come see, to come see how you AI a cow or or it come see how you do an ultrasound to check on marbling while the animal is still alive, things like that, they will always take us up on it. If you flip that on its head, what does it mean to you, as somebody who every once in a while gets to go someplace, to either one of John Doherty's restaurants or places like that, and you see what the chefs are doing with the product that you're raising, with these Angus genetics that you guys have worked so hard on? I guess, what does it mean to you to see that put in play and done really, really well?

Troy: Well, you know what? The way I've tried to explain it is from the time that I make a breeding decision and we AI that cow to the time when that calf grows up and we've finished him out to harvest weight and it gets to that chef, I mean, you're talking a two year process here. And so to see somebody that excited about something that I've put nearly two years into it is really cool. To see somebody that takes that product and goes, "Man, I wonder if I can make it do this" ... I mean, I'm not a chef and honestly, I don't even like to cook that much ... I should say not much ... at all, personally, really.

Troy: I love to eat though, and to see these guys inventing new things, I just think the beef carcass hasn't changed in the last several thousand years per se. All the muscles are still the muscles, but these guys are so inventive and so creative and are able to take the changes that we've made to that physiology and to make that meat better and then they take it another step further, and that's what's really exciting.

Troy: And I often tell those chefs, I mean, and maybe they like this, I thought, maybe they don't, I like to think of the fact that we're on a team together, right? I'm in charge and maybe the first half and then they've got to carry us the second half of the game, because ultimately somebody has got to cook it and somebody's got to want to eat it. And that's kind of where I have to hand off the ball is at that point. So I look at it as a big team effort because honestly, I can go to that two years worth of work and I got some guy that takes a prime CAB rib-eye and steak and burns that thing, it all went for naught,

right? They cook it well done, and it's like, "You've got to be kidding me. Two years down the drain."

Bryan: Just like a chef, the rancher as well dies a little inside when somebody orders a well-done steak, right?

Troy: I did not stay up all night saving those calves so you could burn your ribeye steaks. But really, in my mind, it's a team effort and we're all working hard and kind of carrying the ball and pushing the same direction. It's amazing what you can accomplish. But it really is. I'm absolutely fascinated by what those guys can do. One of my favorite things of being able to go to the CAB conferences is keeping up with these chefs and watching what they're doing and having some conversations. And I know they get excited when I send them pictures from the ranch. I'm just as excited to see when they've got a big smile on their face and there's this beautiful steak on a plate. I like to think, "Hey, I did a little something to help make that happen and look what happens when we work together."

Troy: So it's a cool thing. I really do, I really crave those relationships. I think it energizes me, and I hope that my passion for raising cows and doing all those cool things that we do, like AI and ultrasound, I hope that passion kind of rubs off on them and they say, "Yeah, you know what? I want to make sure I'm doing my part, too." And it's a really fun thing to see happen.

Bryan: Excellent. And if you are listening and you want to actually see what's happening on the ranch, you and your wife Stacy both are very strong in the social media game world on the Instagram. Can you give us your tags?

Troy: Yeah. Well I'm pretty tough to find, just search Troy Hadrick in any of them and you'll find me. I don't go by any secret code names or anything like that. So, yeah, @troyhadrack on Twitter. I tend to do a lot on there. I do a little bit on Instagram. Same name. My wife does a little bit more on Instagram, maybe a little less on Twitter and whatnot. But yeah, you can search her @stacyhadrack, S-T-A-C-Y. There's no E in there.

Troy: But yeah, and we love it. I mean, tell me what you want to see. I mean, I'm happy to throw up pictures and show people what we're doing. And days like today, I don't get my phone out very much because it means I have to take my glove off and I got to keep my iPhone battery from freezing if it's outside too long. But yeah, I mean, I love those relationships that we can build even if they are online and hopefully when we're doing that, working with the chefs, we can kind of paint that full picture from ranch to the plate. And I hope people know that story and maybe it helps them enjoy that steak even a little bit more.

Bryan: Excellent. One last question before we go. What is the official steak cut of Mr. Troy Hadrack?

Troy: The official steak cut here at the Hadrack household at the L Half Box Ranch is no doubt the bone-in ribeye steak.

Bryan: Giddyup.

Troy: Hook me up with that and I am a happy guy and you always, always, always, the rule is that you eat the spinalis first in case the house burns down.

Bryan: That's planning right there. That's impressive.

Troy: You don't want to take any chances when you got a cut of meat like that sitting in front of you.

Bryan: That's right. Don't let it go to waste.

Troy: Absolutely.

Bryan: Mr. Troy Hadrick, I appreciate your taking time to join us here on the Meat Speak Podcast.

Troy: You bet.

Bryan: Hey, best of luck, and we certainly appreciate all that you do and hope mother nature keeps you in her good graces moving forward.

Troy: All right. Thanks, Bryan.

Bryan: Thank you, sir. Take care.

Bryan: Back here on the Meat Speak Podcast, Bryan Schaaf. Chef Tony Biggs with us back in studio. We appreciate you staying the extra couple minutes to join us. Mr. Mark McCully, chief executive officer of the American Angus Association, how's that steak?

Tony: Mark is ripping through that steak. Look at that. Look at this.

Mark: There's a bite or two left. What'd you bring me, like 18 ounces?

Tony: I think that was an 18 ounce. Beautiful, grilled. I got up at 5:30 this morning to get down here and to grill this for you and poach that egg. I don't do that for everybody.

Mark: I'll be here every morning.

Tony: I love you, baby. I love you.

Mark: I'll be here all weekend.

Tony: Wow. Hey, I got to ask you a question because it's been on everybody's mind in the whole world. I went to a chain. I'm not going to mention the chain, but it's maybe second. Here's this one and then this one. And I went through the drive-through and I ordered the Whopper and then I ordered the Impossible Whopper.

Mark: Yeah. You just kind of gave the chain away.

Tony: Yeah, I know. And then I got home-

Bryan: A nondescript Whopper.

Tony: I discarded the tomato, the lettuce, the bread, the mayo and all that. So everybody wants to hear from you. What do you think of this Impossible Burger and the rage behind it?

Mark: Well, I talked about the first thing farmers and ranchers want to talk about right now is the weather. The second thing they want to talk about are alternative proteins, and where do they fit in as we look at our food system. I'm all about consumer choice. We've got a growing population in this world. We've got to get innovative with how we effectively and safely produce protein and foods for hungry folks around the world. So I'm all about innovation.

Mark: I think my only word of caution on some of these alternative proteins is they tend to get positioned as better for you and better for the planet. And I would challenge maybe both of those claims. I think when you look at the healthfulness of some of these products, they can be loaded with sodium. The label on these products, there's a lot of things in there. There's some soy and some wheat fillers and things. And again, I don't mean to be bashing them. I think there's some great alternatives to have out there, but you look at the label on a ground beef patty and it has one ingredient. That's beef.

Mark: And then the planet piece, I think a lot of times these products get positioned as being more sustainable for the environment. And that's where I'll probably have the most heartburn, to be very honest, and that's where my farmer and rancher friends also take some pretty big exception. They are out working land, ranch land that honestly cannot be used to generate any other crops. It is grassland that we use that that cow, that ruminant can go out there and upcycle that cellulose, that grass into this great high quality protein we know as beef. They do it efficiently and they're very, very sustainable in the way they do it.

Mark: I think these alternative proteins are here to stay. I think they can be an important part of a food choice option for consumers, and I think that's a good thing. I just would just say that we need to be a little bit careful how we think about these products in terms of their healthfulness and in terms of, are they more, if you will, sustainable than traditional products. The science really doesn't support that.

Tony: You mentioned the farmers again and the ranchers. I have to tell you the one thing that ... There's many things, but the one thing I really love about certified Angus beef is the education part of it. When you begin with our brand, the brand takes you out to cattle ranches to meet the families. And I had a chance when I first started here to meet the Pfeiffers. And just not only, they are such good people-

Mark: Salt of the earth, yeah.

Tony: Salt of the earth. They care about the environment, they care about what they do, and they care about you, the consumer, the most important part of what the end product is. My hats off and I love them.

Mark: In Reno, I talked about our heritage of Angus and that heritage of family is so profound when you go back and study the history books. And that's what I love to about brand and around Angus. We bring those families together around the love of Angus cattle and great Angus beef.

Bryan: Yeah, yeah. You know, Mark, you touched on it a little bit in terms of the environmental piece. One of the things that's always kind of shown through is when you look at a lot of these farms and ranches, the idea of preserving your land, preserving it for the next generation, there's a feel good factor. I know that's the easy thing for the general public to latch onto, but really, I mean, there's economics behind it.

Mark: Absolutely.

Bryan: It makes great sense for a farmer to reclaim some of their water for cattle and a lot of these different things. Yes, it feels good. It's the right thing to do. But truly, I mean, it comes down to economics, right?

Mark: Well, yeah. I mean, it really does. And I think that's where, again, you talk to a rancher and you started talking about sustainability and here's somebody that they'll tell you about their great-great-grandfather that homesteaded the place and their family has been on that ranch ever since. They kind of laugh at you when you talk to them about sustainability though, "Well, yeah, that's what we've been doing for a long time. We've got to make this land better to hand off to the next generation." I mean, these people have a tremendous amount of pride, not only in being able to maintain a livelihood, but maybe more importantly being able to to hand something off when they see their kids come back to that ranch or that farm and be able to hand it off to them maybe better than it was handed to them in the first place. There's a lot of that going on in modern day agriculture, probably a story that gets missed.

Bryan: Yeah. As our own president, John Stika once said, "There's nothing less sustainable than not actually making an income to stay in business," something that certainly resonates with farmers, it resonates with chefs, it resonates with meat people in general. You got to make a living.

Mark: Yeah. Sometimes profit, it maybe seems like a dirty word, but I think when you think about it, it's obvious, right? Any family business, small business, large business, there has to be profit, right, to be able to continue on and continue to do what we do.

Bryan: Excellent. Mark McCully, one last question before we wrap. From your perspective, from your position as the head of the pyramid of the largest breed association, I mean, you look everywhere, black-hided cattle are dominant. Everywhere you look, the bulk of the American herd is black-hided. They're Angus-based. And if there's somebody, a message that you can put out there to the general population, people are getting farther and

farther away from the farm, from where their food comes from, from where the cattle are raised. If there's a message that you can convey to those folks in the large metropolitan areas ... Every once in a while we run across a chef who's never actually seen a live cow. It exists ... I guess what would that message be on behalf of yourself in the organization?

Mark: Yeah, I mean, I just think about the members that I get to work with every day, the ranchers, the farmers that are out there. I would just want the consumer to know how much these folks care about what they do. They care about their cattle, they care about the land. The food they're producing is the exact same food they feed their own families. There's a shared values across the farmers and ranchers and the consumer. There's no difference there. I'm excited that we're talking about having more transparency, having more, "Know where your food comes from," discussions. I think that's super healthy because I think when consumers realize the work and the care that goes on to produce the great, highest quality, again, most affordable food supply in the world, I think they're going to feel really, really good about that.

Bryan: Excellent. Well said. I lied. One last question. What cut do you want Tony to cook for breakfast tomorrow?

Tony: Oh, wait a minute. Wait. The next time I see him, is that going to be tomorrow? He's going to get tomahawked. He's going to get the 36 ounce tomahawk.

Mark: For breakfast? Breakfast. Nice. Nice.

Tony: For breakfast, yeah, with three poached eggs and red wine hollandaise.

Mark: I better not eat from now until breakfast.

Bryan: Merry Christmas. Mark McCully, CEO of the American Angus Association, we thank you for taking time.

Bryan: If this is your first time tuning into the Meat Speak Podcast powered by the certified Angus beef brand, we invite you to subscribe. It's available across most podcasting platforms. By now, there are a number of other episodes that you can pick and choose from, or if you want to shoot us an email, let us know if you like what we're doing, if you don't like what we're doing, if you have some ideas for things you would like to learn from the good chef or our meat scientist friends, just shoot us an email at podcast@certifiedangusbeef.com. We'd be quite happy to hear from you. So until next time, chef, goodbye.

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