

One Thing Leads to Another

By Dana Stewart, Director of Member Services

Every youth organization touts opportunities for building leadership skills, networking, and responsibility. But, if you've been involved with the Gelbvieh breed for any period of time, you've seen that the American Gelbvieh Junior Association (AGJA) mission is often fulfilled through its members.

Staci DeGeer of Kansas is just one example. As many AGJA members before her, Staci is taking her dedication and passion she developed as an AGJA member and is applying it to her academic career.

Staci, daughter of Jim and Terri DeGeer, is a senior at Kansas State University where in December 2007 she will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Food Science and Industry with a Science Option. What Staci says started as a simple brochure for her College of Agriculture Honor's Project, mushroomed into a research project. When Staci had finally chosen a topic, she found something that not only interested her personally, but could also affect the industry. The project initially had a budget of \$500. But as the opportunity for more valuable research presented itself, the budget grew to nearly \$20,000—far more than most undergraduate research projects.

DeGeer's research project is designed to determine the combined effects of two different dry aging methods on two loin-cut styles, both bone-in shell loins and boneless strip loins. Two aging times, 21 days and 28 days, will be compared and the effects on flavor, juiciness, tenderness, palatability, development of the unique dry-age flavor, moisture vapor loss, and microbial growth will be analyzed. The other research objective is to determine the effects of post-dry aging storage of steaks in vacuum packages on dry-aged flavor stability.

Staci credits AGJA for helping her be more confident in her abilities. "I can work with others. I can plan events, make schedules, and follow through with questions," she says. "As an added bonus, I was able to learn a lot more about the beef industry. Not to mention all the people I've met that I will continue to see throughout my life."

Staci joined AGJA when she was eight years old and you could say the rest is history. She not only became an active member in the Kansas Gelbvieh Junior Association, but also took an active role in AGJA by participating in the Junior Classic held each summer.

As time progressed, Staci decided it was time to do more for AGJA and chose to run for the AGJA Board of Directors. Staci was elected to the Board of Directors and served two years as AGJA Secretary. During her time on the Board, Staci chose to attend the Junior Classic without her cattle. A sacrifice that she says allowed her to spend more time focusing on the needs of other members.

Staci's project started in early October and all data should be collected by mid-November. "We will be collecting data on weight loss, trim loss, pH, moisture, fat, protein, shear force, sensory, and microbial growth," says Staci.

"Weight loss will be taken throughout the aging time, but all other values will be taken on Day 0 and Day 21 or 28," she adds.

Since the original purpose of the project was to create a brochure for her college, Staci will be creating a bulletin describing the art, history, and status of dry aging

research. It will also provide a detailed description and explanation of dry aging process variables.

But more importantly, she will also be writing an article to submit to several industry journals – an opportunity to share her research and shape new ideas among industry leaders.

Staci has been accepted into K-State's Food Science graduate program. She starts on her master's degree in Food Microbiology in January. Staci has an internship lined up for the summer of 2008 and hopes to wrap up her master's degree in December 2009. She plans to get a doctorate at some point.

So the next time you're about to eat a steak, you can think about Staci and the potential impact she's making on the industry. A few years from now, who knows—there may be the DeGeer dry-aging method.

Just remember that your own organization, AGJA, helped her, as well as many others along their path to success. It's never too late to get involved by joining your state association (and if your state doesn't have one, then start one!). Get involved nationally by attending an AGJA-sponsored show this summer. Just get involved and meet your potential with AGJA.