

## Schleich Family Recipient of Excellence in Agriculture Award



Chad Bell of Mercer County and Tyler and Cassie Schleich of Warren County took top honors in Illinois Farm Bureau's Young Leader awards.

Bell won the Young Leader Achievement Award, which recognizes Young Leaders for their efforts in production agriculture, leadership ability and participation in Farm Bureau and other organizations. Achievement Award applicants must have production agriculture as their primary source of income.

The Schleichs were awarded the Excellence in Agriculture Award, which recognizes members who are outstanding leaders and actively contributing to Farm Bureau, other agricultural organizations and their communities. Applicants may also be actively farming, but their primary source of income is not production ag.

"It is a great accomplishment for individuals and couples to be state finalists in these competitions," said IFB President Richard Guebert Jr. during the announcement.

Bell is a sixth-generation farmer who has been farming full time since 2013, raising corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa. He also finishes about 4,800 pigs a year for a local farm. A current Mercer County Farm Bureau member, Bell also served as the District 3 Young Leader representative from 2015-2019, holding an executive board position this last year.

The Schleichs have an Angus and Simmental cow/calf operation, and also own and operate Schleich Cattle Services and are independent contractors for Genex.

A chance meeting at the Illinois State Fair led to Tyler and Cassie Schleich tying the knot in 2012. And as they began to grow their family, they also grew their cattle breeding service.

Raised on farms, Tyler and Cassie's passion for agriculture was instilled at a young age. Tyler was born and raised in Warren County, where his family had a small row crop and livestock. His interest for Angus cattle "took off" while working for another farmer, when he learned how to breed cows.

Cassie grew up in Knox County on a grain and livestock farm, showing cows in 4-H and building a herd from heifers. "I played sports but ag has always been my passion," Cassie said. "I loved growing up on the farm, it's in my blood. From FFA to 4-H, I loved all the different experiences."

The two were introduced at the state fair in the hog barn, and found themselves in the same class the following week at Western Illinois University. In addition to their business, Cassie works from home in crop insurance and is pursuing her real estate appraiser license. Tyler is a district sales manager with Kent Feeds.

Aside from their Angus and Simmental cow/calf operation, they own and operate Schleich Cattle Services and are independent contractors for Genex and custom breed 1,000-plus head annually, as well as sell beef semen.

Their flexible schedules allow them to run their business, and not just breed cows on the weekends as they did previously. "When we started breeding cows together, we had no idea this business would take off like it did," Cassie said. "I'm most proud of what we built together and the name we made for ourselves."

The two have held multiple leadership roles at both the state and county levels. Both serve on the local Cattlemen's board, with Tyler having previously served as president and Cassie is currently the Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau treasurer. Both have served as Young Leader

chairs for Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau and the couple is proud to be invited speakers at the Genex Beef Elite Leadership Summit in October.

The two started in Young Leaders shortly after they were married, and said the networking and friendships made through the program are invaluable. The two also are active with outreach, with Tyler speaking to 4-H groups and at schools and colleges. Cassie added the Tri-County Cattlemen's Association also gives out scholarships with members participating in fundraising cookouts.

Based on their experiences growing up on farms, Cassie and Tyler say they cherish exposing their daughters — Scarlett, 6, and Sutton, 3 — to farm life and teaching them about agriculture. "I just think it's the best way to raise our kids and the opportunities in ag, especially livestock, make for the kids," Tyler said. "It shows them responsibility and compassion." Both added the application process for the award can be time consuming, but it proved to be a welcome learning experience. "We spent time reflecting on our past, talking about goals, and it was good for our marriage and future of our business," Tyler said.

Evan Hultine of Bureau County was runner-up for the Achievement Award and Shane Hussey of Lee County was runner-up for the Excellence in Ag Award.

The winners will represent Illinois at the American Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers and Ranchers National Competition in January. All the finalists will be awarded prizes. "I look forward to these Young Leaders as they grow in their skill set to be the future leaders of tomorrow, on a county level, and at the Illinois Farm Bureau level," Guebert said.

*This article was pieced together from August 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 26<sup>th</sup> FarmWeek articles, written by Tammie Sloup.*



*Tyler & Cassie Schleich*