

Tokach to be honored as NDSA's Top Hand

St. Anthony rancher Richard C. Tokach will receive the NDSA's highest honor, the Top Hand Award, at the annual convention in Bismarck in October. He will join an exclusive class of 22 cattle ranchers who have received this elite award over the organization's 91-year history when he accepts his bronze at the annual recognition banquet Oct. 10.

"The Top Hands Award recognizes those individuals who have given unselfishly of themselves, demonstrated outstanding leadership and earned the highest esteem of friends and associates across the cattle industry," explained NDSA President Dan Rorvig. "Richard is one of those individuals who has always gone above and beyond for North Dakota's and the nation's beef producers, and it is a privilege to publicly recognize him for his service."

The operation

In 1898, Stephan Tokach, Richard C. Tokach's great-grandfather, homesteaded the ranch the Tokach family still calls home, east of St. Anthony. Tokach's grandfather, Matt, purchased the homestead from Stephan in 1939. In 1955, Richard's parents, Richard "Dick" M. and Theresa Tokach purchased the family's first registered Angus heifer from Lyle Dawson of Oak Coulee Ranch. The majority of the Tokach herd can still be traced back to the foundation female purchase. Tokaches continued to develop the family's Angus herd, selling bulls private treaty for a number of years. In 1975, they hosted their first production sale at Kist Livestock Auction in Mandan, a tradition that is still held annually the third Monday in February by Richard and his wife Kathy and their family.

Today, Tokach Angus Ranch is a purebred seedstock operation. They begin calving in February with the bred heifers, followed closely by their established cowherd. In May, they begin heat detecting and artificially inseminating large groups of their females — something they



Richard C. Tokach served as the NDSA president from 1998 to 2000.

have done in their breeding program since 1975. They also utilize embryo transfer. They vaccinate, tattoo and hot-iron brand the calves in small groups in May and move them to their respective pastures by the end of the month and the beginning of June.

During the summer months, the pastures are on a twice-over rotation schedule that the Tokach family keeps a close eye on. "We spend a lot of time moving cattle and checking water sources," explained Tokach. "This helps us be better stewards of the land and better producers." September is spent chopping silage and weaning calves. "The cattle are rounded up in each individual pasture and the calves are hauled home," said Tokach. "Once they are home, the calves are weighed and vaccinated." By November, they will have moved all the cattle within

five miles of their home place, and they continue to graze crop residue fields.

By the end of December, the cowherd starts to receive a silage chopped hay ration and mineral supplement. The cowherd then gets moved to the fields and pasture behind the family's farmyard in January. They normally market their steers in January or early February, and the heifer calves not selected as replacements are sold in May.

Industry involvement

"We grew up in 4-H and always had livestock projects," Tokach said as he explained his start in the agriculture industry. "I attended North Dakota State University (NDSU) for animal science and my goal was to return home and continue the family operation. I was fortunate enough to do so."

He credits his father for having the most influence in his agriculture path. "He was active in most things agriculture," said Tokach. "I followed in his footsteps, so to speak." Because of this, Tokach said he was given the opportunity to have more educational opportunities relating to agriculture at a younger age and



Richard C. Tokach is shown delivering his president's message at the 2000 NDSA Annual Convention in Bismarck.

expand the scope of the Tokach operation. "Experience in different endeavors paid off for me and for our operation," said Tokach.

Every day, Tokach looks forward to the work day ahead. "In my role [in the agriculture industry], each day brings new challenges and new opportunities," said Tokach. "As long as I am excited for those opportunities, I just keep moving forward."

Tokach believes being well-round means being willing to continue learning and continue serving. "I have been willing to be a member and serve on different boards and committees over the years," he explained. "And I became an NDSA member because of my dad." Tokach became an active member after he attended the Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC). "That's when I really understood how important it was to be involved in the industry and gained more confidence," said Tokach. Little did he know that attending YCC would open many doors to his future, serving on the NDSA Board of Directors, then as vice president and then as president of the association from 1998 to 2000.

In addition to his involvement as a leader of the NDSA, he chaired many committees, was a part of the District 4 Nominating Committee and attended countless Spring Roundups, Feedlot Tours and other association events. He has been a tour host for the All Breeds Cattle Tour. He is also a member of the North Dakota Stockmen's Foundation (NDSF) Board of Directors, which he helped lay the groundwork for.

When Tokach is asked what he is most proud of in his time in the NDSA, he notes the inception of the Foundation, as well as the Tomorrow's Top Hands Beef Leadership Summit, where he and Kathy have been on the planning committee since the inaugural Summit. "I encourage everyone to be involved, take it, broaden your horizons," he said.



Tokach Angus Ranch is a family-run operation. Pictured (L to R) are Richard, Briar, Kathy, Bentley, Natalie and Ben Tokach.

Family

Tokach never forgets to mention the family that came before him and his family that is at his side today. "I am most proud of my family," he stated. Richard and his wife Kathy have three children. Their oldest daughter, Rebecca, and her husband Alex Acheson reside in Elk Point, S.D. Rebecca works for Tyson Foods and Alex is the North Central region field representative for the American Hereford Association. They have two children, Cooper and Emmett. Tokaches' son Ben and his wife Natalie work alongside Richard and Kathy in operating Tokach Angus Ranch. In addition, Natalie is a territory manager for Boehringer-Ingelheim Animal Health. They have two boys, Bentley and Briar. Their youngest daughter, Renae, and her husband Tanner Gress reside in Mandan. Renae is the NDSU Extension agent for Morton County, while Tanner is an agronomist for CHS. "Working hard and time with your family goes hand in hand in a number of agricultural settings, including ours," he said.

"This award is a great honor. As I look back, it isn't the awards or recognitions, it's the relationships and the friendships I have developed," said Tokach. "Kathy and I are fortunate to have friendships all across the country, and it has all come from the cattle business. All we ever wanted was to live a good life and be happy, and we get the opportunity to do so." 🌻



Richard C. Tokach was instrumental in initiating the Stockmen's Foundation. Pictured (L to R) are Foundation directors Jason Zahn of Towner; Richard C. Tokach of St. Anthony; Renee Erickson of Dickinson; Gene Harris of Killdeer; and Warren Zenker of Gackle in 2014.