



GROWING-WY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Hands in the Work, Eyes on the Why: A Season with the GrowinG Internship



On the first morning of her GrowinG Internship this season, one intern walked straight into a spring snowstorm. Her host ranch was in the middle of calving, so the day meant round after round through three pastures, checking newborn and older calves for any signs of hypothermia and learning quickly why ranchers watch their animals so closely when the weather turns.

It was a fitting welcome. In the weeks since, this year's interns have built gated pipe, set tarp dams in irrigation ditches, doctored calves for pinkeye and pneumonia, rebuilt fence, repaired water pumps, and fed bottle calves before the sun was fully up. The

"Just because everyone else is doing it doesn't make it right or better."

Host, on why he runs Red Angus

G r o w i n G

Internship is not a classroom. It is real farm and ranch work, done alongside the people who do it every day.

Program Overview

The GrowinG Internship is a paid, ten-week, hands-on internship run through the University of Wyoming's Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. It places students on working farms and ranches across Wyoming and asks hosts to put the educational experience first while interns dig in, ask questions, and reflect on what they are learning.

The program launched in 2022 with support from a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant. It is designed for beginning farmers and ranchers: people of all backgrounds and experience levels who are early in their agricultural journey and want a fully immersive way to find their footing and their future path. Co-directors John

Hewlett and Dr. Ben Rashford lead the effort.



What Interns Are Learning

The visible work is varied and physical. Interns move and sort cattle on horseback, feed bottle calves, watch for grass tetany and put out mineral, and help with branding, vaccinating, and lamb docking. They build gated pipe, set tarp dams, move wheel lines, fence around pivots, and troubleshoot pumps, wells, and headgates. They run tractors and skid steers, grease the parts that wear, pull weeds, remove invasive species, and see how rotational grazing and soil health fit together.

The deeper lessons live underneath those tasks. When a reservoir dried

“This internship taught me more than any class I’ve ever taken.”

GrowinG Intern

up and turned to mud, one intern watched a host solve the problem on the spot by hauling in a water tank so the cattle would not get stuck. Plans change with the weather, a breakdown, or a sick calf, and interns learn to think on their feet. They learn that clear communication keeps an irrigation crew from flooding the wrong field, that small jobs like checking fence and water are really about staying ahead of bigger problems, and that, as one intern put it, ranching involves far more than working directly with animals.

The Value of Host Operations

None of this happens without host families. They open their operations, share decades of hard-won knowledge, and let interns learn by watching how decisions are made under real conditions. Just as important, good hosts explain why decisions are made.

One host walked an intern through his reasons for flooding pastures with tarp dams instead of buying pivots, from the infrastructure he already had in place to the way flooding recharges the water table. Another explained why he runs Red Angus rather than following the crowd, telling his intern that just because everyone else is doing it does not make it right or better.

Interns quickly learn that every operation is different, and that there is usually more than one good way to reach the same goal. Hosts often widen that learning by introducing interns to neighbors, horse trainers, veterinarians, and industry events. When hosts reapply year after year, and some say they would hire their intern full-time, it is a sign the relationship runs both ways.

Student Growth and Reflection

The clearest growth is in confidence. One intern who had never flood irrigated described being nervous and full of doubt the first time, then, a couple of weeks later, running fields and water sets on his own. Another, new to sheep, jumped into lamb docking at a ranch camp and came away certain he could try new things and be useful in a working crew.

Curiosity runs through the interns’ weekly reflections, which are full of honest questions about grazing, water law, herd nutrition, and predator control. So does humility. Interns write about listening to everyone around them, including peers their own age, and about recognizing when something is outside their skill set and knowing who to ask. Most of all, they describe a growing respect for how connected and complicated a modern operation really is, and a desire to be more responsible and reliable with each passing week.

Why the Program Matters

Beginning farmers and ranchers face steep hurdles: the cost of land, the price of equipment, and the years of experience it takes to manage an operation well. The GrowinG Internship helps interns begin to clear some of those hurdles by giving them paid, practical experience and connecting them to mentors and a wider network.

It also moves hard-won knowledge from one generation to the next, the kind that rarely fits in a textbook and is usually passed down in the saddle, at the chute, or beside an irrigation ditch. Several interns have used educational events, such as the Wyoming Stock Growers Convention, to meet producers, university staff, and policymakers, and to start thinking about leadership roles in their own communities. That is how rural agriculture keeps renewing itself.

2026 Season

This season is still unfolding. Interns who started in a snowstorm will spend the coming weeks haying, working brandings, attending educational events, and taking on more responsibility as they earn their hosts’ trust. Their weekly reflections, posted under the InternTales tab at www.growing-wy.org, are the best window into that progress.

None of it would be possible without the host families who share their operations and the partners who support the work. As one intern reflected after a past season, the experience taught more than any class ever had and made her feel like she belonged in agriculture. That is exactly what the GrowinG Internship program sets out to do.

