

Angus producers get a firsthand glimpse of how their brand is distributed and the story that accompanies the product.

by *Katie Alexander, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Gate to plate was just a buzz phrase for many Angus producers until they came along on the Beef Blitz Product Tour, just ahead of the 2016 Angus Convention in Indianapolis, Ind., on Nov. 4.

It started with a look at the first Sysco distribution house to partner with the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand and moved on to the retail side with a visit to a local Meijer supermarket.

The producers knew all about Angus pedigrees, selection, breeding and feeding cattle, but not so much about what happens after the packinghouse.

“Ranchers were excited to see what happens to their product once it leaves the ranch,” said Deanna Walenciak, CAB marketing director. “We got an incredible behind-the-scenes tour and were able to enjoy samples along the way.”

Scale of operations would impress anyone: Sysco-Indianapolis serves 4,000 customers.

In its 325,000-square-foot warehouse are 10,000 products, many on display along the tall aisles. The Fortune 100 company runs “24/6,” closing at 4 p.m. on Saturday to reopen at 2 p.m. Sunday. But company executives were just as interested to learn about cattle.

“We have to tell the story of how you ranch, and handling is key,” said Tom Terbeek, Sysco

vice president of sales. “Knowing the story and hearing what you do, day in and day out, is as important to us as being out and selling the product.

“Our customer base wants to know where our food comes from, where it is produced and just as important, how Sysco delivers it,” he said.

At the next stop, the group heard about supermarket leader Meijer, engaging with store officials about beef supplies and the opportunities to meet the growing demand.

“One hundred percent of the beef Meijer sells is CAB,” said Carrie Buck, central region meat and seafood specialist for the 230-store chain. “That is all we sell, and consumers love our meat department.”

That may explain why the company is the brand’s largest-volume retailer.

“Customers love the consistency of the product,” Buck added. “The amount of marbling, and tenderness to the taste and the less amount of fat on the meat, it all works together.”

What sets them apart from other grocery stores is attention to quality in key categories, said store manager Dave Poletti.

“Anyone can sell Del Monte[®] green beans and Pampers[®],” he noted. “The way we built our business was on the quality of meat and the quality of produce. That’s the importance of

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▶ Serving more than 4,000 customers, Sysco-Indianapolis has 10,000 products in its 325,000-square-foot warehouse. The Fortune 100 company runs “24/6,” closing at 4 p.m. on Saturday to reopen at 2 p.m. Sunday.

a good relationship and a good partnership — they know what they’re getting when they come here.”

The importance of quality and building better relationships in all facets was one takeaway from the tour.

That includes sharing stories, not only with consumers but with every “partner” within the industry. That makes each branch work better and keeps employees passionate about what they do, said Pat Luce, Sysco training and development manager.

“Sysco is big, but we are big enough to take care of the small guy,” he said. “One thing I see is passion from you all as cattlemen and passion with us, and with passion there is no limit to what you can do.”

For additional coverage of the Angus Convention — including summaries, speaker presentations, photos, videos and more — visit the convention newsroom at www.angus.media/news/Angus-Convention.



Editor’s Note: Katie Alexander is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

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