



# Standing Out on the Food Scene

Relationships, networking key to driving CAB demand.

by Laura Nelson

If there were ever something that looked out of place in Miami, Fla., it's a cowboy hat on the scintillating boardwalks of South Beach. But what's unique is what usually makes a splash, and that's certainly what the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand brought to the table at the Food Network's South Beach Wine & Food Festival.

"One of the truly unique assets of the brand is that we have connections from the ranch clear through to five-star restaurants," Deanna Walenciak, CAB director of trade marketing, says. "Our goal at the festival was to get the *Certified Angus Beef* brand in front of some of the most influential chefs and restaurants in the food industry, along with interacting and educating consumers."

The Angus breed, quality beef and cattlemen shared the spotlight at one of the largest and most prestigious culinary events in the nation. American Angus Association

President Bill Davis and wife Jennifer, Sidney, Mont., joined fellow ranchers Steve and Ginger Olson, Hereford, Texas, for the prelude dinner that kicked off the festival at

Red, the Steakhouse.

Nearly 200 people paid more than \$200 per ticket to get into the extravagant dinner, where celebrity chef Michael Symon and Red executive chef Peter Vauthy served four courses of CAB brand products. Davis and Olson started it with a toast, but that wasn't the first Miami had seen of those cowboy hats.

Prior to the festival, CAB Corporate Chef Scott Popovic reached out to more than 100 of the hottest chefs across the

country, including the likes of Paula Deen, Rachael Ray and Emeril Lagasse. In addition to these Food Network TV stars, Walenciak explains, many "new, up-and-coming, trendy chefs" received information about the brand, sample strip steaks and profiles of the



▶ South Beach burger

Davis and Olson ranches, along with their invitation to gather at South Beach and learn more.

"Just like in the cattle business, there are certain players in the restaurant industry who are the trendsetters, and people watch them to find out what the best products are. We want CAB in those people's hands and in front of them all the time — this was our opportunity to do that," Walenciak says. "We were able to use this event to open some doors and drive demand for our product."

That paid off later in the week's activities at the Grand Tasting Village, where Ray, Bobby Flay and Sandra Lee (also featured on the Food Network) used CAB product in live cooking demonstrations.

The event also cultivated more inroads and relationships with chefs who may have already been using CAB product in their restaurants, but weren't licensed to advertise an official partnership with the brand. It's those relationships with licensed accounts that build brand equity, Walenciak says. One southern Florida restaurant signed on to partner with CAB shortly after the Wine & Food Festival, and it's now selling several thousand pounds of CAB middle meats each month.

"Being able to bring potential customers to an event like the South Beach festival was just part of the package that allowed them to understand our company, appreciate our product and get on board with our team," Walenciak says.

Those networks, combined with more than 2 million media impressions garnered after the festival, will be what keeps the CAB brand relevant and admired in the foodservice world, she adds.

## Consumer one-on-ones

It sure doesn't hurt that 23,000 more consumers sampled steaks with all the fixings in the Grand Tasting Village on that extended weekend, too. For another \$200-plus ticket, the general public could spend four hours sampling food, wine and watching live cooking demonstrations.

"That was our chance to have intimate, one-on-one conversations with consumers who wanted to know more about quality beef," Walenciak says. "We got to explain to them what the brand was all about, where they could find it and directly drive sales and brand exposure."

In a matter of three days and only 11 hours, the CAB team sampled more than 600 pounds (lb.) of strip steaks, 250 lb. of potato salad and 6 gallons of barbecue sauce.

"It helped," she adds with a grin, "that the CAB sampling booth was decked out in

▶Above: From left, Chef Peter Vauthy of Red, the Steakhouse; *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> brand Corporate Chef Scott Popovic, and Iron Chef Michael Symon.

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Western décor — complete with cowboy hats, straw bales and lariats” — which stood out as plainly as the cattlemen’s Stetsons at the prelude dinner.

“People were asking where they could buy the cowboy hats. We stood out, and consumers loved it. We love that our roots at CAB are in the Angus business, and we love being able to bring that aspect of the beef industry to this upscale ‘foodie’ crowd,” Walenciak says.

### Producer view

The cattlemen involved in the dinner went home with a little more appreciation for the other side of their industry, too.

“It makes us proud and encourages us to continue to try even harder to produce the type of beef that makes for a great center-of-the-plate experience for consumers on an everyday basis,” Steve Olson says.

“These chefs have to start with a consistent product, they all relayed that to me at the dinner,” Bill Davis adds. “We all need to be more dedicated to focusing on producing CAB and getting more people involved in creating this product.”

While the event was focused on building



► From left, Bill and Jennifer Davis, chefs Peter Vauthy and Michael Symon; and Ginger and Steve Olson.

relationships that will drive CAB demand in the foodservice world, Davis points out that has a direct correlation to his business in Montana.

“The people who were at that dinner were there for the beef. They want an eating

experience that is above and beyond anything they can get anywhere else. There’s no doubt in my mind that’s the reason there is a premium for high-quality black cattle in today’s market,” he concludes.

