



Quality Game

Angus Convention gave cattlemen competition and perspective about the beef carcass.

by Morgan Marley, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Deep in the heart of cattle country, ranchers make a lot of decisions. Which bulls will best complement my cows' genetics? When should we ship calves? Should I retain ownership?

In environments where cattle thrive, people don't typically crowd the landscape. Like the old saying, "out of sight, out of mind," the beef marketer and consumer are not always top of mind with producers.

For the second year, Angus Convention had meat on display for all to see, along with a meat judging contest. The temptation of friendly

competition goes deeper than pure entertainment.

"Not very often do producers have exposure to the actual end product outside of what they consume themselves," says Clint Walenciak, director of packing for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. "Having it on display is a conversation starter; they see what is going on with the brand and ways they can tie to it with what they do."

Opening up dialogue about CAB gets cattlemen thinking about the decisions they make on the ranch and how those affect consumers.

Ultimately, every CAB steak starts at the registered purebred level.

"Seedstock breeders are the ones responsible for putting those key carcass genetics out into the marketplace to be propagated," Walenciak says. "It all starts with them — and getting them to understand that quality continues to be so important moving forward, given the demand for higher-quality beef that we see today."

Genetics are only half of the equation for getting an animal to meet the 10 CAB carcass specifications. Genetics must be



Colorado State University meat lab manager Joe Bullard (left), and Bob Delmore, professor of meat safety and quality, broke down the top sirloin on the trade show floor.

balanced and managed carefully to be maintained all the way to the packer.

“Think about the Prime grade for example,” Walenciak says, “just because we’ve now achieved essentially an 8% Prime grade compared to 2% Prime 20 years ago. There’s still pent-up demand for that kind of high-quality product.”

On the trade show floor, ranchers could find the Colorado State University meat trailer. It wasn’t about learning how to cut meat, but more emphasizing how the added marbling in a CAB carcass adds value to items like the chuck or the round, even compared to USDA Choice.

“Exposure to different cuts, like whole ribs, whole short loins or whole beef rounds gives the attendees an opportunity to see beef products in a form they typically don’t,” Walenciak says. “Something much larger than a steak or a roast that they would be more accustomed to.”

It was a time to share with producers what the brand teaches those who sell and prepare premium beef. Chefs, retailers and consumers provided perspective about the people behind the brand and how they use and enjoy it. Think “cooking techniques, understanding cuts and messaging.”

Anyone at the convention could participate in the meat judging contest, which let contestants directly compare varying grades of beef on four different cuts. Equally important was their opportunity to engage with and learn from those conducting the contest about what’s important. The kind of cattle they want on the ranch need not be different than what meat judges rank at the top: high marbling with moderate to heavy muscle and not too much external fat.



Delmore shared insights on wholesale cuts of beef, and how added marbling adds value across the entire carcass.



The informal nature of the contest allowed participants to make their way through the different classes of beef cuts at their own pace. Here is a class of short loins.



Cutter Pohlman focuses in on a rib. He placed second in the senior division of the contest.

Contest winners

Judging contest winners from the adult division were: Karen Mitteness, first; Patrick Doyle, second; and Andrew Stewart, third. In the senior division, first place was Kallie Knott; Cutter Pohlman, second; and Sherrie Stokman, third. First place in the junior division was Colter Pohlman; Nico Donati, second; and Gemma Donati, third. This year, first place from the three categories won a hat of their choice from Greeley Hatworks. Second- and third-place winners received gift certificates to the CAB Black Hide Collection™.

“Don’t you think we’ve spent enough time focused on marbling?” That’s a question Walenciak gets a lot, and not always from people who have spent much time on it. Those who have focused on marbling know it doesn’t mean ignoring other areas.

To get past individual cases, Walenciak clarifies it: “For the industry as a whole?”

“No,” he’ll say with a nod to the market. There’s still a need to meet rising demand and keep advancing high-quality carcass traits.