

# Certified Angus Beef



## CAB Program Pays Off

A question frequently asked by Angus producers is, "How does Certified Angus Beef directly add value to my cattle?"

The first step in answering this question is to look at how cattle become Certified Angus Beef. Cattle must first be killed in a licensed CAB packing plant. A licensing agreement between the American Angus Association and the plant exists to ensure integrity in the use and promotion of the federally registered CAB trademark.

A plant employee, who has been trained by CAB, identifies all cattle that meet the CAB live specifications. These specifications are: predominantly black, with beef-type conformation (no visible dairy influence), and not have a hump or large, floppy ears (characteristic of Brahman influence). As soon as the hide is removed, cattle that meet these specifications are stamped with a blue "A."

Following processing, the identified carcasses are scrutinized by a USDA grader, who evaluates them for the following CAB carcass specifications: Modest middle Choice) or higher marbling degree, "A" maturity (youngest maturity classification for beef), a USDA Yield Grade 3 or leaner, and medium to fine marbling texture.

Only after carcasses pass these specifications are they rolled (labelled) as CAB. Currently, less than one in five carcasses that pass the live specifications also pass the carcass specifications. This is a concern for the CAB Program and licensed packers.

The quality of cattle that are sent to packing plants is very important, says Max Davis, vice president of livestock at National Beef Packing, Liberal, Kan.

"We are currently working on two premium programs to encourage producers to raise above average cattle," says Davis.

One program focuses on premiums for above average cattle, based on their carcass merit, with additional premiums for cattle that qualify as CAB.

Lanny Binger, senior vice president, sales and procurement for Excel Corp., Wichita, Kan., says Excel looks for cattle that have high muscle to fat ratios.

"Excel is buying more black cattle because of our involvement with Certified Angus Beef," he says. Excel cattle buyers are encouraged to seek out cattle that

could potentially qualify for CAB.

Because the average acceptance rate for Angus-type cattle that qualify for CAB on the rail (in carcass form) is currently only 20 percent, it's difficult for buyers to determine which cattle will qualify. However, some producers have shown the buyers that their cattle will perform.



*Carcasses that have passed all Certified Angus Beef specifications are rolled with a CAB logo.*

"I've been able to get a higher premium for my cattle by showing how a previous group did," says Ken Stielow, president, Bar S Ranch, a cow-calf producer in Paradise, Kan.

Stielow backgrounds his cattle and maintains ownership on the majority of them. He has participated in the CAB Carcass Data Program for two years.

"Until I could show buyers how my cattle were performing, I was unable to get a higher price," says Stielow.

"I found it paid to feed my cattle a little longer to reach middle Choice and above," says Gene Krab, owner of Krab Inc., a diversified farm, cow-calf and feedlot operation in Paxton, Neb.

Krab participated in the CAB Carcass Data Program to learn how his cattle were performing. He says packers will bid against one another because they know his cattle perform well.

The CAB Program is still growing and developing. Currently it accounts for less

than two percent of the fed beef merchandised in the United States.

"There is still tremendous potential for growth in the '90s for CAB, limited only by the ability of Angus cattle producers to produce predictable cattle which will consistently meet carcass specifications," says Mary Ferguson, associate director CAB Program.

The Certified Angus Beef Feedlot Gain and Carcass Contest, which began Jan. 15 at Decatur County Feed Yard in Oberlin, Kan., gives producers an opportunity to see how their cattle perform. The cattle will be judged on feedlot performance, carcass merit and qualification for CAB.

The contest also provides an educational tool for identifying how genetics affect carcass traits. Producers can benefit from gaining knowledge of bloodlines which have potential for increasing carcass quality and feed efficiency.

The CAB program, started 12 years ago, is the largest specification-branded beef program in the world. The demand for CAB is expressed in more than 5,000 restaurants and 500 retail stores that serve CAB to their customers. Through these outlets, more than 84 million pounds were sold last year

Even more can be sold if producers learn about CAB specifications and how they can raise cattle that meet those standards. These standards are very important to restaurants and retailers.

Edd Hendee, owner of Taste of Texas Restaurant in Houston, says his customers come to his restaurant for a high quality steak.

"I need consistent, high quality beef because my customers can tell the difference," he says.

The Certified Angus Beef network is very similar to the "beef train" featured in the advertisements sponsored by the American Angus Association. The train is pulled by consumer demand, which affects everyone from the restaurant/retailer to the breeder.

Consumers are demanding the consistent high quality flavor of CAB. This demand will pull the train, and eventually, everyone who is riding will reach their desired destination.

— *Cindy Flock*