

# The Measure of a Man

*Steady and personable, Riemann's legacy lives on at CAB.*

*by Miranda Reiman, senior associate editor*

Jim Riemann had many official titles — meat scientist, professor, food safety expert and former president of Certified Angus Beef (CAB); but those are mere job descriptions. They don't give the whole picture of the man who may be most fondly remembered as a builder of people.

"He always saw the best in everyone. He just wanted everybody to succeed."

Those words belong to Mark Gwin, a former student of Riemann's and now 19-year CAB employee, but they could have come from Heidi, Maggie or Jody. Steve, Brent or Deanna would echo the remarks.

"You could talk to 100 people at CAB, and they'd all tell you the same thing," says John Stika, who took the reins when Riemann retired in 2006. Only the second person to hold that post, Riemann bridged across the span when CAB fully emerged from its niche roots to the established worldwide brand.

## Deeds big and small

"He changed the trajectory of my life, truly," Gwin says.

As a meat science professor, Riemann believed the Tennessee

farm boy and just-average student had greater potential. So he assigned Gwin an assistantship with judging team responsibilities and encouraged his interest in meat science. Along the way, he taught Gwin about life, leading by example.

That's why Gwin says it hurt so much when the call came that Riemann had passed away suddenly at his home near Wamego, Kan., this January.

As staff members heard the news, the hallways at CAB

echoed with memories. People retold similar stories of Riemann carrying their luggage through the airport or recalled the end-of-season tailgate Riemann and wife Nancy threw for the company's community softball team. He was known to box up belongings and help co-workers move across the country, and he showed up early to the office after nearly every snowstorm, just so he could scoop the walk.

Perhaps in those moments when they first heard the news, no one said, "I'm so glad he was at CAB because he got us through the uncertain days following BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy] and guided us through to becoming a limited liability company."

He did those things, too, but

he'll be remembered first as a true servant leader.

## Leadership when it was needed most

"When Jim took over, it was really a time of transition," Stika says. "We were no longer a startup anymore. You had the entrepreneurial leadership of Mick for those early years and the first 22 years."

Riemann had big shoes to fill, and that likely weighed on his mind as he took two weeks to consider the initial job offer after it was extended. When he accepted, the nominating committee could celebrate.

"Jim brought a real sense of stability to the brand and the team. He brought a tremendous level of credibility in the eyes of the industry, and I think that was really important, too," Stika says.

Riemann's experience was impressive: more than a decade at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in a teaching and research role, followed by time spent fostering the Excel (now Cargill) research and development team. While there he helped invent and patent the steam-pasteurization process still used as a food safety intervention today.

But it was more than a stacked résumé that landed the next president in Wooster.

"He had the reputation of being incredibly hardworking. There was probably not anybody who would work harder to get the job done,



and it didn't matter what the job was," says Larry Corah, former vice president for CAB and member of the search committee when Riemann was hired. "He had an excellent reputation in the meat science community. He was very grounded in the research and practical aspects."

All that, and he was a people person, a trait that continued to prove valuable during his tenure.

"At annual conference, he and Nancy would be at the door during the opening reception, greeting everybody that was coming in," Corah says.

They made the CAB family their family.

Riemann built easy rapport with staff and partners alike, which helped as tough times emerged.

## Navigating changes and challenges

When Riemann took the post in 1999, he quickly studied the business, absorbing all he could from tenured staff already on the CAB team.

"I learned from Jim that to lead you don't have to be the one making all the decisions. You don't have to have the vision by yourself," Stika says. "We're surrounded by good people here. Let good people do good things."

Riemann led the company when its growing international program encountered one of the largest hurdles it had ever faced — the discovery of BSE in the U.S. beef cow herd. He steadied the team when the rise of store brands and rapid increase in other Angus programs threatened to take away space in the retail meatcase and overall market share.

"There was a period of time when the phone kind of quit ringing. That's the reality of it, but Jim did a great job of constantly reinforcing, 'Now is not the time to compromise,'" Stika says.

Quality and integrity were the mantra on which Colvin's team founded the company, and Riemann was willing to listen to any ideas for advancement so long as they didn't compromise that, Stika says.

"He saw this team of people that were passionate about the brand, and he was adamant, 'I'm going to do whatever I can to help this team' achieve the things they have in their sights," Stika recalls.

During Riemann's tenure, the brand developed natural and Prime product lines, licensed the first packing plants in Canada, and grew the supply development team to reach more cattlemen across the country.

"Every organization needs *that* person when the time comes that a decision has to be made on a key issue," Corah says. "You knew Jim was going to take a stance, and he was usually very well grounded in making that decision."

Using data, conversations and intense study gave reassurance Riemann was on the correct path when he set his personal compass.

"He was a man of principle and a man of conviction. He had remarkable strength of belief," Stika says.

People trusted him to make the right decision, Corah adds.

The teamwork among CAB and its parent company, the American Angus Association, grew stronger during that period.

"He was a tremendous leader, and I appreciate the fact that I knew him and that I had a chance to work with him," says John Crouch, Angus CEO from 2002 to 2008.

Crouch marveled at Riemann's ability to connect with everyone from rancher and cattle feeder to packer to retailer.

"The programs he put in place always kept in mind that the only

reason beef cattle exist is for the end product. I think Jim never lost sight of that," Crouch says, noting he easily relayed that all the way back to purebred breeders.

Riemann shepherded the process of turning CAB into a LLC.

## The next chapter

As the board voted to modernize CAB's specifications, Riemann saw it as a chance to step back and announced his retirement in late 2006.

"The biggest thing I had going for me was that Jim was nothing but supportive about the change when it came," Stika said. "The minute he decided to retire, there was nothing about that transition that was about Jim. It was about the brand and keeping the brand supported through that transition."

The Riemanns moved back to their home state of Kansas, bought a piece of land and became involved with the community. They were able to spend more time with their children and grandchildren. Not one to sit still for long, Riemann served as the assistant secretary of agriculture for Kansas, and the couple took trips across the country to deliver machinery or bulls for anyone who needed a hand. He enjoyed helping out on his siblings' farms.

Gwin estimates, "Everybody who came into contact with Jim benefited disproportionately."

A tough, but kind leader; someone who liked to help people learn but had no desire to be the center of attention — Jim Riemann's whole nature might seem like a paradox ... except to those who knew him.

Simply put, Gwin says, "He was just a really good man." 