Certified Angus Beef

Meet Your **CAB** *Staff*

Beyond the Feedlot

Packing plants are an important part of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program. In CAB Program-licensed plants, cattle are identified, and carcasses are evaluated to be labeled as Certified Angus Beef product.

The CAB packing division works with the packing and fabricating plants as well as CAB Program-licensed food service, retail and export distributors to ensure labeling is complete, accurate and maintained throughout processing.

Alan Waggoner, director, CAB packing and export divisions, works mainly with packers, from the point of cattle arriving at packing plants until the CAB carcasses are fabricated. Fabricating is the cutting, or "breaking," of beef carcasses into wholesale cuts which are then put into boxes for shipment to warehouses and distribution facilities across the United States and abroad.

Mike Hertel is programs coordinator for the CAB packing division. His work begins after the beef is cut and boxed at a fabricating facility and is ready to be sold to distributors, who, in turn, sell to food service (restaurants), retail (grocery stores) and export customers.

"Most of my work is communicating with packers and fabricators, answering questions and helping them with CAB Program procedures," says Waggoner.

At the packing plant, cattle are first identified as eligible for CAB carcass evaluation. Cattle must be predominantly black, with beef-type conformation, and have no hump or long, floppy ears. This is determined by plant employees that have been specially trained by either Waggoner or Hertel.

After cattle have been identified as eligible for carcass evaluation, USDA graders determine if carcasses pass CAB specifications. All CAB carcasses must have a modest (middle Choice) or higher marbling degree, "A" maturity range (the youngest classification for beef), USDA Yield Grade 3 or leaner, and have medium to fine marbling texture.

Waggoner says he periodically visits packers to make sure they are adhering to CAB Program guidelines and properly identifying carcasses and products. Currently, there are 25 packing plants licensed to process CAB carcasses.

Some of the packing plants also have fabricating facilities; two additional plants are licensed for fabrication only.

Hertel works with communications between fabricators and their customers, the CAB Program-licensed food service, retail and export distributors. He helps distributors find product and helps fabricators identify potential customers when they have excess product.

Alan Waggoner, (left) director, Packing & Export Divisions and Mike Hertel, Programs Coordinator, Packing Division.

Hertel and Waggoner work with many different sectors of the beef industry and are conducting several projects targeted to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of CAB licensees' businesses.

Waggoner is currently working on one project regarding the testing of CAB products from various packers to discover their rank based on yield (muscle to fat ratio) and overall quality.

"The results of these tests will help our licensed retail, food service and export distributors determine the relative value of products from the various fabricators," says Waggoner.

Waggoner is also working on a compilation of yield and quality grades of cattle identified as eligible for CAB Program carcass evaluation but whose carcasses do not qualify as CAB. He says the study will provide information to help evaluate how CAB carcass specifications relate to carcass traits identified in the general population of Angus-type cattle.

"One concern is the declining CAB Program acceptance rate," says Waggoner. The acceptance rate is determined by dividing the number of carcasses accepted, or certified by the total number of live cattle identified as eligible.

Waggoner says over the past four years the acceptance rate has declined from a high of about 25 percent acceptance to only 17 percent acceptance today. This means less than one in five predominantly black cattle eligible for CAB carcass evaluation are eventually accepted and labeled as CAB product.

There are several trends in the beef industry that Waggoner cites for this decline. He believes the cattle cycle has reached a period where supply is limited and demand has remained virtually the same. This resulted in the record high live cattle prices of the past year. Because of these high prices, feedlots have been sending cattle to packing plants earlier, which means fewer cattle have the necessary marbling to qualify as CAB carcasses.

Waggoner also notes that crossbreeding with exotic cattle has increased. Studies, such as the one at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb., show that these exotics usually have a greater inability to reach the high level of marbling needed to qualify for the CAB Program.

Other trends include greater use of growth promotants and feedlots' emphasis on increased gains and feed conversion, which may have a corresponding,

negative effect on marbling deposition.

Waggoner says he looks forward to the time in the cattle cycle when feeders will keep cattle longer, helping to increase the marbling scores of their carcasses.

Another program that will be beneficial to the CAB Program's acceptance rate is the American Angus Association's work in sire evaluation.

Through the CAB supply development division's carcass data program, a service available to both registered and commercial Angus cattle producers, information is collected from within test herds on registered Angus sires' progeny. The American Angus Association is the only breed association to conduct an ongoing sire evaluation program for carcass merit. It generates expected progeny differences (EPDs) in carcass traits for many sires.

While many of Waggoner's projects deal with the identification and certification of CAB carcasses, Hertel's projects deal mainly with the relationships between fabricators and distributors.

Hertel is currently working to promote premium and buying programs between individual fabricators and distributors.

Certified Angus Beef is a value-added product because of the program's stringent guidelines that ensure quality. Hertel says packers and fabricators have additional expense in handling the CAB products. These facts cause it to command a premium above USDA Choice product in the marketplace.

The additional expenses packers experience sometimes include paying a premium at feedlots for cattle that show high potential of yielding CAB carcasses. Also, packers must pay for USDA graders' extra time spent evaluating carcasses for the CAB Program and for additional employee time spent separating these carcasses from others.

Fabricators also have added expense in CAB product because they must treat CAB as a "grade change" during fabrication. This means completely clearing the cutting tables and processing line of any other beef to make sure that no commodity beef (Select, Choice, Prime), can become mixed with it.

Hertel notes that premiums have historically been higher in the summer. Less CAB product is available at that time, due to lighter weight cattle being sent to market. Premiums are lower in the winter because supply of CAB product increases at that time of the year.

His programs are designed to help packers, fabricators and distributors experience as little fluctuation as possible in their business because of these supply variations.

"I help keep the lines of communica-

Mac Donald Meat Co. Receives Restaurant Award

MacDonald Meat Co., a licensed Certified Angus Beef purveyor-distributor, and owner William "Bill" Jones received the Supplier of the Year — 1991 award from the Restaurant Association of the State of Washington (RASW). The Seattle-based foodservice meat purveyor received the award January 13 at the Association's Hospitality Industry Testimonial Dinner.

Jack Gordon, R&SW executive vice president, said that the award is presented annually to the supplier whose products exemplify the highest levels of consistency and quality, and who demonstrate outstanding service.

Jones, whose career in the meat industry began in 1945, purchased MacDonald Meat Co. in 1976. While focusing his career on the foodservice and hospitality industries of Washington and Alaska, he has been an active member of the National Association of Meat Purveyors, serving on severalof the organization's governing committees. Bill was the recipient of the Angus Award in 1988, one of the highest honors of the Association which represents the national meat industry

Held prior to the convening of the state's legislature, this yew's 25th Anniversary RASW gala banquet and ball was attended by more than 1,000 of the state's political and hospitality industry leaders.

MacDonald Meat Co. is a family owned company employing approximately 50 area residents. It is directed by Jones' sons, Greg Jones, president and William Jones, vice president. It has been a part of the CAB program since 1978 and is licensed for foodservice, retail and export. Areas serviced by the company include the sttes of Washington and Alaska and several Asian cities.

Washington State's Lieutenant Governor, Joe Pritchard, left, presents the Washington Restaurant Association 1991 Supplier of the Year award to William "Bill" Jones and MacDonald Meat Co. of Seattle. MacDonald Meat Co. is the CAB purveyor-distributor for the state of Washington.

tion open between all companies involved in the Certified Angus Beef Program," says Hertel.

His work includes traveling to visit CAB licensees as well as attending various trade shows to meet others and keep up-to-date on industry happenings.

These activities certainly keep both Waggoner and Hertel busy in the packing division. Recently, Waggoner has also begun work with CAB's export division. In Waggoner's role as director of theCAB export division, he works with CAB Program-licensed exporters, promoting CAB product in foreign countries.

"My work with export will be to develop new foreign markets and further develop existing markets abroad," says Waggoner.

He will be working closely with export distributors to make sure CAB Program policies are followed in order to maintain the integrity of the American Angus Association-owned Certified Angus Beef trademark.

The CAB Program process — from after cattle arrive at the packing plant until the beef is presented as an entree on the dinner plate — can be complex.

The program continues work to uphold the integrity of the federally registered Certified Angus Beef trademark. It's an assurance to consumers that if a label says Certified Angus Beef, the package contains a high quality, highly palatable beef product which will provide the tenderness, juiciness and flavor they've come to expect.

— Cindy Flock

Straightbred Angus Win National Western

Agronomists often talk about hybrids, the crossing of two strains of a plant that help them obtain a higher yielding, better suited strain.

This has also been used in the beef industry as people crossbred their cattle. Some have contended that the bestcarcass animal is a crossbred. But, is that always true?

"I entered straightbred Angus heifers in the carcass contest to show that Angus could win," says John Schurr, manager of Schurrtop Angus Ranch, Farnam, Neb.

Win was exactly what those heifers did at the National Western Stock Show Fed Beef Contest. These straightbred heifers beat all other breeds, including crossbreds, to take top honors in the contest.

Schurr entered a pen of six heifers in the contest. The data from the best five carcasses were used in the scoring. This pen won the heifer division and went on to take overall grand champion honors.

Three of the heifers were sired by Montana Power 96; the other two were sired by Deep Creek Knockout 77. The carcass data on the five heifers was:

Average hot carcass weight: 709 lbs.
Average fat thickness: .55 in.
Average ribeye area: 14.5 sq. in.
Average internal fat: 2.4 percent
Average yield grade: 2.59.

Two of the heifers graded low Prime, two graded high Choice and one was average Choice. Each one of these heifers passed the specifications to become Certified Angus Beef.

Schurr says he chose the heifers for the contest based on information he had received through the CAB carcass data collection program. The data collected on steers with similar breeding the year before showed a high percentage of lean, well marbled cattle.

Schurr has been participating in the CAB carcass data program for almost three years. He says he has always been concerned with carcass performance of his cattle.

On his ranch, Schurr raises purebred Angus and operates a feedlot. Most of the cattle from his breeding herd are sold as bulls or replacement heifers, so he buys most of his feeder cattle.

He says he likes to buy feeder cattle sired by his bulls, or by bulls he knows will excel in carcass merit.

"The carcass data program is also helpful in bull selection. I have been able to gather information on which bulls excel in carcass performance, and even which cow-lines are good," says Schurr.

In addition to carcass data, Schurr is also concerned with performance attributes in his cattle.

"The Angus breed is very beneficial because the cattle can perform well in addition to having high carcass merit," he says.

In addition to having the overall grand champion pen in this carcass contest, Schurr also had the reserve champion pen in the steer division, all of which were Angus sired.

This is Schurrtop Angus Ranch's third consecutive year of winning the National Western Fed Beef Contest. His previous years' winners were also Angus sired.

Schurr also has the distinction of winning the overall champion at the 1990 Great Western Beef Expo Fed Beef Contest, again with a pen of straightbred Angus.

Schurr sums it up, saying that people in the Angus business need to stress that they can produce cattle with good carcasses that can also perform, even against crossbreds.

— Cindy Folck