

LEAD IN

Richard L. Spader

Executive Vice President, American Angus Association

There's a lot of talk about branded beef programs, but most of it is just that—talk. Some of the programs in the testing phase that offer branded beef packaged for retail at the packing plant seem to offer some promise. But most of the other programs are small and basically sell a low quality product at premium prices. It is difficult, over the long haul, to sustain a premium pricing program for a product that most consumers can pick up at regular prices at their local supermarket.

What's different in all the branded beef hoopla is the Certified Angus Beef program. It is large by many standards—nationwide, even worldwide in distribution. CAB offers a premium product that is consistently excellent. It is the only branded program, in fact, with high quality standards that are guaranteed not only by the program operator, but by the USDA grading service. There is no way to fudge on the CAB program when supplies get tight because the Angus carcasses that qualify for the CAB roll are selected not by the packer or the wholesaler or the American Angus Assn., but by the USDA grader.

The wide availability of CAB, and the assurance of quality and consistency that come from high CAB standards in cooperation with the USDA, make the CAB program unique. No one else offers these benefits, which is probably why no one else has a branded beef program this large or one growing at such a fast rate.

With increasing frequency, the American Angus Assn. and the Certified Angus Beef program receive recognition for the pioneering work done and the success of the program. Recently a newsletter service devoted the entire issue of "Crittenden Cattle Buyers" to the Certified Angus Beef program. The four page newsletter published in Novato, Calif., begins like this:

"Years of mistrust between packers and producers foul attempts to control consistency and quality in beef production. Yet the success of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) program proves that trust can provide rewards for all. The program brings together packers, feeders and producers as never before. . . .

The newsletter goes on to point out

many of the accomplishments of the program. Here are a few random quotes:

"Outsiders criticize the program for not offering premiums. . . . Yet producers reap rewards because the breed is being promoted and demand grows. This pushes up prices for Angus cattle. . . .

"The packers all wish they had more Angus to kill. Their buyers scour the central and northern USA. They have to compete with non-CAB packers for black cattle. . . .

"Fewer Angus qualify for CAB while marketings remain so current. . . .but the program's tight specifications draw praise from the packers involved."

The news service editors contacted nearly every packer involved with CAB. All had good things to say about it. For example:

"Brent Dabell handles supplies for both (Clovis, N.M. Packing Co. and Booker, Texas, Custom Packing) plants. Angus makes him proud of the cattle he sells because he can trust them, he says. . . . Brent Dabell says he'd be happy if the plant killed only Angus.

"Kenosha Beef International, Kenosha, Wis. . . . searches for Angus calves and yearlings to feed for slaughter. Kenosha started its own feeding program last September. It currently has 10,000 to 15,000 cattle in feedlots throughout Illinois.

"Litvak Meat Co., Denver, Colo., joined the CAB program 18 months ago and is one of its strongest advocates. Angus cattle make up 40 to 75 percent of its daily kill of 1,200 . . . Buyer Bernie Hodapp says CAB advances the value of Angus carcasses and opens the door to a lot of specialty retail stores.

"Reeves Packing Co., Ada, Okla., tries to kill only Angus cattle. It searches through Illinois and Kansas for top quality animals. It pays more for these than it would for any other."

Kind words indeed for Angus cattle and the Certified Angus Beef program. Thanks to CAB, we have more people than ever out singing the praises of our cattle, Angus breeders, and your Association. It's no accident that registrations show significant increases this fiscal year or that Angus bull sales are better than at any time in the past few years. 

