

# Saltgrass STEAKHOUSE

*Certified Angus Beef™ products and the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program's training and promotion fill the need for this Texas-based restaurant chain.*

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

"Tender, juicy and flavorful" are the words Terry Turney, general manager, hears most often when customers comment on the Certified Angus Beef steaks served at San Antonio's Saltgrass Steak House.

**As** a general rule, Donna Wilham steers clear of eating at restaurants where she works. But since joining the house staff at Saltgrass Steak House last fall, she's made an exception.

"I was just here the other night for dinner," says Wilham, a server at the busy restaurant in San Antonio. "I come here because the food is great. My kids and husband love it, too, and they order only steaks."

Her many customers also rave about the quality and flavor of the steaks at Saltgrass Steak House and want to know how they prepare it.

"I've never had any complaints about the steaks, and our customers often ask how we get them so flavorful and juicy," Wilham says. "I tell them we buy only the best *Certified Angus Beef™* [steaks]. We start with our signature Saltgrass Steak House Seven Steak Spice, a specially blended, herbed seasoning, and we top them off with a frothy, light butter just before they're served."

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## High standards

Other Saltgrass Steak House staff members throughout the Houston-based chain of 11 casual-dining restaurants agree with Wilham and emphasize the importance of serving *Certified Angus Beef* steaks.

"I've been very happy with *Certified Angus Beef* [products]" says Phillip Kunkel, purchasing director for the 7-year-old company. "It is a consistent product that adds value for our customers."

At the San Antonio restaurant, general manager Terry Turney, a member of the Saltgrass Steak House team since 1993, knows firsthand the importance of serving only *Certified Angus Beef* products.

"We used to serve [high-]Choice beef, which we believed to be a very high-quality product, until we became disappointed with its consistency," Turney says. "Research into the CAB Program proved it to be a much superior product with the same high standards we strive to meet at Saltgrass Steak House."

## Understanding the product

Throughout all its restaurants in Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio, Saltgrass Steak House provides a rigorous week-long training for all staff members, which includes familiarization with the CAB Program.

The company's 90-page waitstaff training manual even includes three pages on Certified *Angus Beef* products. The detailed information covers the eight *Certified Angus Beef* grading specifications, including marbling, maturity range and beef muscling characteristics, as well as types of beef cuts and the myths and facts about beef.

Before opening a new restaurant, managers also spend a day in Austin with Mort Kent, vice president of sales with Lone Star Foodservice Co., Saltgrass' licensed *Certified Angus Beef* distributor. Kent's overview covers the CAB Program from farm to table and includes a walking tour of the meat-processing plant.

## Educating the consumer

The next phase of the training program involves educating the customer. In the first month after a new location opens, customers are given the CAB Program brochure called "Taste the Difference," which defines the *Certified Angus Beef* product in terms they can understand and appreciate.

In the weeks following the San Antonio opening (Sept. 1997) Turney and his staff handed out more than 5,000 brochures.

"The extensive training program is paying off for all of us," Turney says. "Sales are up company-wide, and beef now comprises at least 50 percent of all sales at my location."

## Choosing favorites

On the Saltgrass lunch and dinner menus, customers favor the "Wagon Boss" top sirloin and "Maudeen's" filet wrapped in bacon. Two very popular combination plates offer *Certified Angus Beef* steaks served alongside buttery, scampi-style shrimp or marinated, char-grilled quail. Turney's personal favorite is a big, juicy "Pat's Ribeye" served with a hot baked potato and all the trimmings.

"What makes a steak flavorful and juicy comes from the marbling," Turney says. "We occasionally get requests for extra-lean steaks, and we oblige. But 'tender, juicy and flavorful' are the words we hear most often when folks talk about the *Certified Angus Beef* steaks we serve up hot and fresh at Saltgrass Steak House."



Team leader Alvaro Herrera prepares steaks for customers at the San Antonio Saltgrass Steak House.

## Customers testify to quality

Like a lot of San Antonio business people, Larry Mofle eats lunch out regularly. And when he and his fellow field-engineers at CompuCom head out the door, they often drive to the Saltgrass Steak House.

"I come here once a week, sometimes more," Mofle says, in between bites of Caesar salad. "The food is good, and the service is excellent. I'm a steak-and-potatoes kind of guy. Plus I like all their signs. I want some for my home."

As a matter of fact, enough old-time metal signs hang throughout the restaurant to decorate several homes. Lots of other Texas Hill Country touches add to the



Larry Mofle, Juan Hernandez and Billy Yeary sit down to enjoy 6-ounce sirloins, their favorite, at Saltgrass Steak House.

restaurant's relaxed atmosphere. Retired license plates share space with mounted deer and longhorn trophy heads on walls built of barn wood salvaged from an Amish barn and red bricks sandwiched with thick mortar. Huge columns of limestone separate dining areas.

Today, it's Tuesday noon, and Mofle and his associates, Juan Hernandez and Billy Yeary, have all ordered 8-ounce sirloins, their favorite. Though all three confess they don't know much

about the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program, they readily attest to Saltgrass' better-flavored steaks over those they've eaten at other restaurants.

"You can tell the difference," Hernandez says. "Plus they also pay attention here to how they cook their steaks."

"To me," Mofle interjects, "it's not whether it's Angus or Hereford. It makes no difference. You don't ask your girlfriend, 'Honey do you want Angus tonight?' You ask, 'Do you want steaks?'"

Meanwhile, in an adjoining dining room, Fred and Jean Davenport of Boerne, Texas, ask for something different today, ordering grilled chicken and baby back ribs. But they're familiar with the Saltgrass reputation for great-tasting steaks.

"This place has a good quality steak for the money," Jean says. "We enjoy the flavoring and the seasonings. I want my steak to have a good flavor and to be tender. And I don't want too much fat on it because I have to watch my cholesterol."

Back in the main dining room, waitress Donna Wilham deftly serves the three men's plates of steaming sirloins and vegetables.

"It's very good," Yeary says, savoring a bite of medium-rare meat. "Juicy. It's not dry. It's tender, very flavorful. Not heavy, just right."

"Mine tastes absolutely delicious," Mofle nods. "It's a taste beyond words."