

CATTLE CULTURE

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

The Mark of Quality

How do consumers know a product is high-quality?

When it comes to turquoise jewelry, one of my guilty pleasures, quality is fairly simple to identify. Spin around that pendant or cuff, and you should find an artist's name stamped into the back.

My eyes latch onto that single mark, and any doubts I might have previously had about the piece's worth are instantly erased. More often than not — though

I am ashamed to admit — the newly confirmed authenticity is enough to convince me to purchase the piece.

This simple process is reflected in all kinds of markets — from designer clothing to the meat counter at the grocery store. Clothes are set apart with specific brand names, and steaks with a familiar *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) logo stand out from the rest.

Humans are drawn to quality. The simple truth is a driving force behind supply and demand. When something is considered “good” and “satisfying,” people want to purchase it. The concept, as we've already shown, is pretty easy to apply to clothing, jewelry and (thanks to the standards set by CAB) even beef.

How does that apply to your cattle herd? Fellow producers can likely

take a quick tour of your ranch and determine easily if you promote quality herd management practices. Consumers, on the other hand, don't have that innate ability.

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At the store, the average person knows the designer names of clothing brands. The average person can easily spin a piece of jewelry in their hands until they identify the

presence of a stamp. At the meat counter, the average person likely knows the CAB logo signifies quality.

Yet, how can we show people what quality back home on our farms and ranches looks like? To me, it's all about setting standards. From those labels and stamps to CAB, consumers know they're quality products because that's what they've been taught. Knowledge about the quality of these products has circulated to the point where the general public knows what sets an individual item apart from the crowd.

It's time for the agriculture industry to define “quality” in our line of work. Quality agriculture is not limited to pesticide-free fields or cattle raised solely on grass. While these areas do meet the definition of

quality in their own rights, they are not the only production methods capable of meeting higher standards.

Education is what creates quality. If I had never been taught about the value in the inscription on turquoise jewelry, I wouldn't search for it on the pieces I consider purchasing. If society hadn't told us the worth in an authentic red bottom on a high-heeled shoe, no one would buy into the trend.

What are you doing to educate your consumers about the quality behind your product? Teach them the methods behind your decisions. Show them why we do what we do in the cattle business instead of berating them for not understanding.

Invite people for a day spent shadowing you on your operation. Take to social media to pull back the veil separating producers from consumers. Strike up a conversation with a customer considering that plant-based meat option at the grocery store. Do your part to provide the education they need, to show them what makes something from our industry “quality.”

It's not a label or stamp that makes something more valuable than the rest. It's the power behind the stamp that makes something deserving of the title of high quality. **AJ**