



Up Front

► by **John Crouch**, executive vice president

A chain of quality

Three hundred strong they were. They came from all parts of the United States, Canada and various other countries throughout the world. Many different segments of the beef industry were represented. Among the attendees were ranchers, farmers, feeders, packers, retailers, distributors, fabricators, processors, consultants and others representing every facet of high-quality beef production.

Exchanging ideas

These industry experts attended the annual Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) conference in Baltimore, Md., in mid-August. Invited attendees participated in a host of workshops regarding all aspects of wholesale and retail beef sales.

They freely exchanged ideas with respect to sales, packaging and advertising to attract consumers to *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) products. Notable industry leaders like Dave Shula of Shula's Steak Houses shared experiences regarding the successful operation of a high-quality steakhouse chain. Taste drives were conducted, which allowed participants to sample a plethora of new CAB products.

Those in attendance were privileged to hear many outstanding speakers. Cattle-Fax's Randy Blach presented a moving overview of the cattle industry with respect to supply and

demand. While per capita consumption of beef has remained unchanged in the past few years, the fascinating aspect is that consumers are paying 25% more for the product. This demand growth, Blach said, has added \$240 per head to the price of finished cattle.

We are in an era of consolidation, Blach said. The largest 9% of our producers control 51% of our cows. The largest 50 lots feed 65% of the cattle. The top five packers process 48% of the cattle. Ten supermarket chains sell 55% of the food. These factors being so, it stands to reason that other industries, including the commercial and purebred sectors, will eventually consider consolidation in order to effectively compete in the food production sector.

Other speakers, such as Frank Maguire, head of Maguire Communications and a founding senior executive at FedEx, talked

about the importance of leadership and building relationships. As has been stated many times, we are in a people business. The rest is incidental to that.

Knowing the product

Julie Shen, an international facilitator, consultant and keynote speaker for Master Connection Assoc., spoke of the value of leadership, the importance of timely conflict resolution, personal customer service, team building, the attitude of management and the relationship of these factors to customer relations.

If we provide a special customer service experience each time we are in contact with customers, we will indeed build brand loyalty. These observations apply not only in the food business, but in every aspect of life, including the cattle industry.

Those who were invited to attend the CAB conference are primarily involved in direct marketing of CAB brand products. They form a unique group that blends together knowledge of the meat industry, superb marketing skills and infectious enthusiasm second to none. They all feel special in their fields because they know the CAB products they market are, without doubt, the very best.

And, as Angus seedstock producers, we can feel very proud and very special knowing that we play an important role in genetically designing a wonderful eating experience.

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Editor's Note: For more information about the CAB annual conference, see the coverage that begins on page 111 in this issue.

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REGIONAL MANAGERS—Refer to page 287.

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