

Lucille's **Double-Branded**

Lucille's Smokehouse builds on industry leader.

by Jennifer Kiko

Many Californians know the story of Lucille Buchanan. According to legend (see advertisement graphic below), she was raised on barbecue from her granny's lunch shack. Lucille learned secret recipes for spice rubs, savory wet mops and sauces. She also mastered cooking barbecue in hickory smoke until the meat is sweet and succulent, so tender it falls off the bone.

The story may be more fiction than fact, but the success of California-based Lucille's Smokehouse Bar-B-Que is tried-and-true. George Yueh, vice president of sales at Newport Meat Co. in Irvine, Calif., says it's because the restaurant's owner and executive chef know that to build a successful brand, they must build on the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

"Lucille's owner Craig Hoffman envisioned a West Coast barbecue concept," Yueh says. "At that time, southern California barbecue was limited to small, independent operations using food as the primary attraction. Craig had the foresight to combine great barbecue with other elements like outstanding customer service, great ambiance and a full bar. Together, they create a complete dining and entertainment experience."

Finding a niche for a great barbecue restaurant was only the beginning. Yueh says Lucille's success is built on a commitment to high-quality food, a commitment closely maintained by Executive Chef Chris Ferrell.

Consistent quality

"I enjoy the historical roots of barbecuing. It's the oldest form of cooking known to man, and it's prevalent in every culture," Ferrell says. "Barbecue was my hobby until Craig recruited me."

Ferrell says Lucille's puts its commitment to quality first. "We chose the *Certified Angus Beef* brand because it has proven itself to be the industry leader in quality and consistency. Quality assurance is worth a few pennies on the pound. In five years of operating Lucille's, I've never had an issue with the quality of our CAB product."

Yueh says such a commitment is the necessary strategy to achieve success and to remain competitive. "Quality is the value statement that everybody sees at Lucille's."

During the last 20 years, Yueh says he has worked with hundreds of chefs who identify CAB product as a high-quality alternative to the inconsistencies found in USDA Choice products. Ferrell was already in Yueh's group when the chef worked at The Cheesecake Factory, a national chain serving CAB burgers. It was only natural when

Ferrell sought Yueh's assistance to design the specifications and standards for what was then an untested Lucille's restaurant idea.

"Hoffman challenged Chef Chris to bring quality to every food idea on the menu — at a cost structure that would be profitable for the company," Yueh says. "Like most Newport customers, they had to compare meat options before a final product was selected."

Analytical buyers seek information that demonstrates product value. "When a product costs more, as CAB product does," Yueh notes, "understanding the value is the only way a customer can make a commitment to use it at [his or her] restaurant."

Hoffman and Ferrell studied CAB product and its quality specifications. "They conducted extensive testing to compare the superiority of the CAB brand with other brands. They recognized brand attributes were supported with promotional materials, employee training programs and point-of-sale materials that sent a message of quality to consumers. It was a total package that built brand confidence at the restaurant level," Yueh says.

Driving demand

Lucille's combines Memphis-style sloppy, wet mop barbecue with Texas-style dry rub and West Coast tri-tip barbecue. End meats comprise more than 93% of the chain's CAB product usage, with tri-tips at 41% of that number. The company's total CAB product usage has increased by 46% since becoming licensed in 2001.

"Establishments like Lucille's capitalize on the regional popularity of a cut like the tri-tip, helping to maximize utilization," says Clint Walenciak, CAB director of packing. "These restaurants take the pressure off of more popular middle meats and drive value for the entire carcass. This type of merchandising generates additional brand awareness among consumers and ultimately drives demand for Angus cattle."

That and creating an unforgettable eating experience are goals easily achieved at Lucille's. Mason-jar beverage glasses, red-and-white-checked tablecloths, signature sauces and the sight of cooks preparing the barbecue charm customers. Consistent flavor and quality fuel the restaurant's growing popularity.

"It's 'down-home' style in an upscale way," says Lori Dunn, CAB foodservice account manager. "Lucille's is unique. It's not your typical California chic eatery. Lucille's is proof consumers can have home-style cooking with a classy presentation."

Lucille's
SMOKEHOUSE
BAR·B·QUE

Lucille Buchanan grew up eating barbecue in her granny's lunch shack. She discovered special spice rubs, savory wet mops and secret sauces. And she learned to cook barbecue in hickory smoke until the meat is sweet and succulent and so tender it falls off the bone.

Today, Lucille's Smokehouse Barbecue makes the best barbecue in the country. At least that's what folks say.

Lucille's features the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand—Angus beef at its best! It's beef so incredibly flavorful, naturally juicy and fork tender, it practically melts in your mouth. Only 8 percent of beef meets the brand's unwavering standards.

Lucille's
Smokehouse Barbecue

Where mouthwatering flavor is not only tradition, it's a given.

Ferrell says consumers tap into the primal part of barbecuing as well as the nostalgia associated with it. "Barbecue is part of life. Some of us grew up with dad on the grill in the backyard or enjoyed it at church picnics. It's a sign of times gone by. It's a way to reconnect with a kinder, gentler time. Those feelings attract customers," Ferrell says.

The chef believes barbecue is the classic, true American food. "People love barbecue, they love the 'decadence' of it," Ferrell says. He admits each Lucille's restaurant goes through several thousand pounds of cream, butter, bacon and chicken fat each week. "Those ingredients make the food good. We make real country gravy, real cracklin's and fabulous desserts. We're a [from-]scratch kitchen with a commitment to quality."

Takeout influence

Dunn says Lucille's attention to every detail — from ingredients to ambiance to architecture — has taken the CAB brand and presented it in the best possible light. The restaurant doesn't keep its secret ingredient under wraps, either. CAB logos are present on menus, steak knives, and in-house signage and chalkboards. Bag-stuffer cards were designed for takeout customers.

In addition to reheating and food safety instructions, the cards proclaim the CAB brand message of quality. Most importantly, the restaurant's corporate chef believes in the product.

"Partners like Chef Chris and Lucille's are valuable to the success of the CAB brand," Dunn says. "He's a jet-setter. He offers the brand additional exposure continuously. Other restaurateurs ask, 'What is he doing? What are his menu items? How can I improve?'"

In addition to its legions of fans, the restaurant's popularity extends into the sports arena.

Lucille's caters for the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team and the Oakland Raiders football team. The chain is set to open its sixth store in a few months. It plans to launch 10 additional restaurants within the next 10 years.

"Lucille's receives third-party endorsement, restaurant operator to restaurant operator," Dunn says. "Others see Chef Chris and his love for CAB product.



They notice the restaurant's outstanding customer satisfaction level. They see the brand as a contributor to Lucille's success."

Yueh says Lucille's knows that to build a brand name, it must use a brand-name product. "Everything has to lead to more consistency and quality for the dollars spent," Yueh says. "The CAB brand delivers that and more."

