

# A Reflection on 35 Years Ago

**CAB partner with links to first retail sale says it wasn't easy at first.**

by **Crystal Meier**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

In 1978, a young manager of the grocery department at Renzetti's IGA, Columbus, Ohio, came face to face with a new beef brand that he sells these days to restaurants. Steve Fancelli worked for the first retailer to sell *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) products on Oct. 18. Today, he's a marketing associate for Sysco Cleveland in the Columbus area.

"I remember hearing about it at manager meetings with owner Bob Renzetti," Fancelli says. "He told us about this new premium beef with great pride and how we would be the first to offer it."

Renzetti made a really big deal of it, as he recalls, but Fancelli and his teammates didn't realize how big until Ohio governor James Rhodes came to the store.

The rest is history, with CAB on course to sell more than 800 million pounds (lb.) again this year. It wasn't an easy road or an easy start.

"It was a tough sell," Fancelli says. "Consumers didn't really understand its

value until Bob or the meat manager talked to them about its quality." Brochures and point-of-sale material also identified it as something better.

Fancelli worked at Renzetti's from high school until early 1984, when he took a sales role with Sysco Cincinnati, which became CAB-licensed 15 years later in 1999. By 2003, he was working with Sysco Central Columbus — when it first offered the brand. Then, by June 2010, he was with Sysco Cleveland, which is now a licensed distributor.

Over the years, he considered it a minor coincidence. Then, in summer 2012, he visited the brand's corporate office in Wooster, Ohio, for a training session. He saw the photo in the boardroom, with Governor Rhodes and his sister-in-law Pat (Lynch) Lyons, the cashier, on the big day in 1978.

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► At 8:35 p.m., Ella Whitt purchased the first CAB product at Renzetti's IGA. She is pictured with (from left) Al and Carmella Renzetti; Gilman Stewart, American Angus Association president; Bob Renzetti; James Rhodes, Ohio governor; Whitt; C.K. Allen, Association executive secretary; and Pat (Lynch) Lyons, checkout clerk.



► **Left:** Steve Fancelli and Pat (Lynch) Lyons reflect on the first sale in 1978.



► On Oct. 18, 1978, Mick Colvin (right) shakes the hand of meat manager Bob Slark. During his 22 years as executive director, Colvin led annual sales to nearly 500 million pounds.



## Then and now

- Monthly sales reached 1 million pounds (lb.) in 1983.
- In August 2013 monthly sales surpassed 80 million lb.
- It took 18 months to sell the first million lb.
- It now takes 2.5 hours to sell 1 million lb.
- The first premiums for qualifying cattle were offered in 1986. Premiums reached 50¢ more than a USDA Choice carcass a year later. Today, it's about \$40 per carcass.

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The sister of his wife, Elaine, married one of Fancelli's friends from those days, and he couldn't wait to get home and tell them all about the photo.

"We laughed about Patty's picture being in the world headquarters of the *Certified Angus Beef* brand," he says.

Fancelli realized then that he is simply destined to sell the CAB brand. He also helped CAB staff identify Renzetti's mother,

Carmella, and meat manager Bob Slark in that picture.

A lot has changed in 35 years, however.

"Many consumers understand the brand's value today," he says. "Beyond side-by-side cuttings and taste tests with chefs, the logo is much more recognized in advertising."

"The biggest reason they understand it today is the same as then: suppliers talking directly with customers about its attributes

and benefits," he says. It's especially important when working with restaurants every day, when it's their reputation on the line. They know customers often come to their doors for a great-quality steak.

That's a role he's now more proud of filling for years to come.



**Editor's Note:** *Crystal Meier is a publications manager for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*