

# A Natural Fit



## CAB retailer first to launch new product.

by Lacey Altwegg

Imagine buying the highest-quality natural beef, without dining at a five-star, white-tablecloth restaurant. It's a reality now, and it's in the heart of Oklahoma cattle country.

It was 20 years ago that Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)-licensed retailer Reasor's grocery store signed the dotted line to sell the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. The 15-store chain was the first to climb the ladder to include CAB Prime in 2000. Reasor's continuous commitment to serve the best pointed to the highest rung, offering CAB Prime Natural in their meatcases.

Leading the way to the top is Paul Roach, Reasor's vice president of meat operations, a trailblazer in the industry who started in the meat business 45 years ago. His many titles have included meat cutter, shop manager and supervisor.

"We wanted to be exclusive and different because of the health trends coming into our area," he says. "We are offering something more upscale, where customers can feel good about getting the best beef available."

CAB Prime Natural is so exclusive that less than 0.1% of all beef can earn the distinction. To earn the elite brand name, beef must come from Angus-type cattle never given hormones, antibiotics or animal byproduct feeds ("never, never, never"), and then meet nine more stringent quality standards than USDA Prime.



"I think this program is going in the direction where people are going to appreciate the natural line," Roach says. "We are not sacrificing any quality issues; we're just paying a notch higher."

### Meeting demand

When the employee-owned retailer first brought CAB products into their meatcases, it was the only beef they offered. With the need to rise above competitors and meet customer needs, Reasor's added CAB Prime to all their full-service counters and have now traded up to CAB Prime Natural.

Roach says this "Cadillac of beef" serves their customer base. "Our customers tell us they don't buy meat from anyone else," he says. "Even though we aren't the cheapest in town, customers realize we are offering the best value for their dollar."

CAB's Tara Adams, assistant director of sales marketing, says the product launch is a testament to the retailer's vision. "Everyone just knows that when you go to Reasor's, you are going to get great beef," she says. "I think it is neat for cattle producers to see this premier product being sold in their own backyard."

Although located far from coastal upscale markets, Adams says Reasor's has exceeded

expectations: "They have met or gone beyond sales of the *Certified Angus Beef* brand Prime that they used to sell in those cases."

Roach says their sales strategy fits Reasor's diverse clientele. "We have two different kinds of customers," he says, "those who want the best, traditional CAB product, and folks who want that white-tablecloth meal, which we now offer with our CAB Prime Natural."

The natural "niche" market probably won't expand quickly, Roach figures, but he sees more and more retailers moving that way. "We get high mileage on our pork and chicken natural lines," he says. "I believe we are going to get even more out of our beef."

His knowledge of the beef industry comes not only from many years in retail, but also in cattle production.

### Production to plate

Farming and ranching have always been close at hand for Roach. When he isn't busy making deals in his professional role, you can find him feeding cattle, baling hay or working on his pecan farm. Now living on the farm where he grew up near Tahlequah, Okla.,



Roach manages his own cattle and farming operation.

What started as his dad's Hereford herd is now primarily Angus. "I have always been partial to black cattle for the meat quality," he says. "I think you have less health problems, too."

The two hats of cattle producer and meat man are another natural fit, Roach says. "My goal is to have a good-quality animal that is in high demand when I market it," he says. "On the flip side, I want to have the best beef I can offer to my customers in the meat business."

With experience from both sides of the spectrum, Roach foresees new trends in the industry. "One of the most important changes cattle producers need to be aware of is the transition in demand to more natural and organic products," Roach says. "Don't overlook the natural benefits."

Those who produce for a "never, never, never" program should not lose sense of quality, he adds. "While adding value to the cattle with a natural program, you should also focus on genetics and management that result in top market cattle," he says.

Wearing his businessman hat, Roach says the CAB marketing team and his hard-working Reasor's crew are planning to make waves. "Right now, we are kind of wading into unknown waters," he admits, "but our plan is to make a big splash with this."

► **Above right:** "Our customers tell us they don't buy meat from anyone else," Paul Roach says. "Even though we aren't the cheapest in town, customers realize we are offering the best value for their dollar."

