

CAB[®] Uniformity Rules Take Effect

Packing plants begin using new CAB carcass specifications.

by Steve Suther

Packing plants across North America that are licensed to produce the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand began using new, 10-part carcass specifications Jan. 29.

The Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Board voted last fall to replace the brand's original Yield Grade (YG) 3.9 limit with more-specific consistency requirements (see "CAB program specifications"). That was in response to a trend toward heavier cattle, closely trimmed fabrication of cuts, and other technical advances since the brand was founded in 1978, CAB President John Stika said. It also recognized the top concerns of end users surveyed in the 2005 National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA).

"The future belongs to those who see it first," Stika said of the brand's proactive move. "We have taken a leadership position to solve some industry problems that weren't going to go away. Our changes are by design, a natural evolution in exceeding expectations of our customers, cattle producers and consumers."

The three new uniformity specifications approved by the U.S. Department of

Agriculture (USDA) are a ribeye area (REA) of 10 to 16 square inches (sq. in.), a hot carcass weight (HCW) less than 1,000 pounds (lb.), and an external fat thickness less than 1 in. Those are the three main variables loosely governed by yield grade, Stika explained.

"Our original limit of YG 3.9 allowed too many outliers," he said. The brand's 2005 consist study of 26,700 carcasses at plants in four states found calculated YG 3 carcasses with 1.2 in. of external fat, a ribeye range of 6.9 to 19.0 sq. in. and carcass weights of up to 1,169 lb.

"A better way to fill the box for our customers is to use a narrower ribeye range with a limit on external fat and carcass weight," Stika said. The new specifications will turn aside an estimated 6.9% of cattle that would have been accepted for the

brand in the past.

On the other hand, more cattle better suited to consumer demand should become eligible, for a net increase, Stika said. He acknowledged those will include some YG 4 cattle, but that is virtually irrelevant to end users. "Packers will pay less to producers of

YG 4 cattle, so that cost and market signal will be transferred to where it belongs," he added.

"Our new limits are set up for zero tolerance, and will work well in the transition to more-precise beef grading that includes the use of video camera data," Stika said.

Changes, implications

Licensees and Angus producers welcomed the changes and noted the implications.

"The new specifications will help remove some extreme sizing variables," said Mike Drury, senior vice president at Newport Meat Co., Irvine, Calif. "It is a step CAB had to take to continue delivering the most consistently superior product."

Frank Winters, manager of the CAB-licensed Flint Rock Feeders Ltd., Gruver, Texas, said, "People need to understand, this does not mean we can aim for Yield Grade 4s now. Only a few with the right size ribeyes will get in, and even those will still suffer a grid discount.

"The changes are a good thing," Winters said, but they need to be understood. "We were less specific when we only had the YG 3.9 limit," he said. "That held back demand, cost Angus producers money and allowed other brands to take advantage of some of our work."

North Platte, Neb., Angus seedstock producer Bill Rishel agrees that successful integration of CAB's 10 carcass specifications on farms and ranches depends partly on perceptions.

"CAB is eliminating the third standard deviation of outliers, working on both ends of the ribeye range, and that's just what the foodservice and restaurant operators have been asking for," said Rishel, a former CAB Board president and current National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Product Enhancement Committee chairman.

He compared the CAB changes to strategic trimming. "It's like taking away those outer rings on the target, and allowing a few more to score closer to the bull's eye," Rishel said. "This is a narrower target for us, especially on the ribeye. On the external



CAB program specifications

Carcasses shall be derived from cattle that meet the phenotypic or genotypic (AngusSource[®]) requirements of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specification for Characteristics of Cattle Eligible for Approved Beef Programs Claiming Angus Influence (CLA), and meet the following set of requirements:

- marbling score minimum of Modest or higher;
- lean color, texture, firmness and overall skeletal characteristics of A maturity;
- medium or fine marbling texture;
- ribeye area (REA) of 10.0 to 16.0 sq. in.;
- hot carcass weight (HCW) less than 1,000 lb.;
- fat thickness (FT) less than 1.0 in.;
- moderately thick or thicker muscling overall and in relation to their length;
- practically free (not detracting from visual quality) of capillary rupture in the ribeye;
- free of "dark cutting" characteristics; and
- no hump exceeding 2 in. in height.

Source: USDA.

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fat, it's actually a higher standard than Yield Grade 3.9, and keeping the carcass under 1,000 pounds is basic to most grid targets today," he added.

The market will help keep producers on target, Stika said. "Discounts for YG 4s and overweight carcasses, the inefficiency of putting excess fat on cattle and the higher cost of feed should put a lid on overfinishing."

CAB Packing Director Clint Walenciak said the company has worked with USDA

and licensed packers "to make sure everyone is on the same page, aware of the changes and prepared" for the adoption of the 10 carcass specifications.

Available tools include a one-page, two-sided fact sheet for all licensees, and a ribeye overlay for packers and USDA graders showing the fat limit and the minimum and maximum ribeye area at a glance.

"The new specifications are familiar to graders, who evaluate these same elements to calculate their yield grade calls, but like

any change, it will take some getting used to," Walenciak said.

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