

High Quality on the

Norwegian Cruise Line includes CAB® when planning meals for 4,000 at sea for a week.

by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Meal planning and grocery buying for a busy family week in and week out is a big chore. Now imagine trying to feed 4,000 people when you're hundreds of miles from land.

Welcome to Lars Kristiansen's world.

As director of culinary operations for Norwegian Cruise Line, he works with a team each week to ensure 50,000 guests on 13 ships are all fed — and fed well.

Since last summer, Kristiansen has included the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand as part of that guest-satisfaction plan. Norwegian is the only brand licensee on the high seas.

"It's all about what you want to eat and when you want to eat it," Kristiansen says, noting the company pioneered the "Freestyle Cruising" concept decades ago.

While vacationers enjoy flexibility, making that work takes strategic detail control behind the scenes.

The sheer logistics of stocking a ship for an entire week of entertainment and service might seem daunting, but a comprehensive recordkeeping system makes it manageable. A food database with 1,700 different items helps Norwegian decide the makeup of the 15 or so 40-foot containers it takes to load a medium-sized vessel.

Anticipating consumer wants

"Most guests book in advance, so we have quite a bit of detail on where people are coming from and things like that beforehand," he says. "There is time to analyze what the consumer base looks like for each cruise to be sure we're prepared."

Kristiansen and his eight-member executive culinary team try to compare like itineraries to make informed predictions, which is especially important because of the company's strict sourcing protocols.

"[Proteins] come from one source, and we ship it to all corners of the globe to make sure that we maintain consistency," Kristiansen says.

If a food item makes it on the ship, it's already passed some intense scrutiny.

"We do use a lot of market research data, in-house and other sources, to make sure that whatever we develop is relevant for our guests," he says. "It's all about leading the industry with high quality and consistency."

Heavy scrutiny

Rob Crook, center-of-the-plate specialist with SYSCO South Florida, says the Norwegian crew took part in numerous CAB cutting tests before they decided to visit the Buckhead Aging and Production facility in Auburndale, Fla.

Kristiansen and others toured the dry-aging coolers, the cutting rooms and more. Then they met with the senior management in quality control, production and operations, before selecting the premium beef brand for the onboard upscale concepts, Cagney's Steakhouse and Le Bistro French restaurant.

Of course, being sure the right ingredients are onboard is only part of the puzzle and must be matched with crew training.

"It's an amazing process, to see all the talent it takes to get each steak delivered and prepared," says Emily DePompei, CAB assistant director of international marketing at the time. "It really speaks to the level of teamwork that goes into each dining experience."

Each vessel has one executive chef leading more than 220 foodservice crew members. When they switched to CAB, the cruise line brought brand staff and partners from SYSCO onboard to conduct training sessions for everyone from maitre d's and waitstaff to managers and line cooks.

"*Certified Angus Beef* steak is cut from the best animals, managed by super professionals, and when we get it, it's the best steak on the planet," Kristiansen says. "When it goes on the plate to the actual guest, it must be the same quality."

To encompass that, each training session covered the entire beef industry, from cow-calf producer right up to the meat delivery and preparation.



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High Seas



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“We believe in constant training and the power of knowledge for our crew. We want them to feel comfortable in talking about [beef] with our guests,” he says.

Most meals are included as part of the vacation package, but travelers can upgrade to premium dining options, like Cagney’s and Le Bistro, for a \$25- to \$30-per-head fee. “Sure, they’re concerned about food costs, but they’re more concerned about making Norwegian the premiere cruise line,” Crook says.

Cagney’s was recently named among the “10 best cruise ship steak houses” by *USA Today*, and they’ve increased advanced reservations for premium dining.

“We’ve also seen a higher guest satisfaction score, which is important to us as we differentiate from other cruise lines,” Kristiansen says.

DePompei says CAB is happy to be part of that strategy.

“It’s an entirely different realm to reach our customers,” she says. “It just further shows the true global reach that we have.”



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

