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Re-energizing the Force

High-energy presenters and showmanship help foodservice salespeople understand and sell high-quality beef.

by **Miranda Reiman & Karoline Rose**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

The job of a foodservice salesperson is intense. It requires multitasking, fast-paced responses and an “always on” attitude.

So, asking a group of 150 or more to sit in half-day-long meetings filled with PowerPoints and lengthy presentations goes against their very nature.

“Most salesmen don’t have very long attention spans,” says José Sosa, a district sales manager who has been with Sysco South Florida for 16 years. That’s why he was pleasantly surprised when the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand Meat Lab came to their headquarters in Medley, Fla., in August.

Walking past the fog machine into a room set up with lights and music, he and his colleagues “suited up” in their lab frocks and hairnets.

“It’s theatre, it’s fun and a ton of education,” says Kelly Murray, assistant director of foodservice marketing for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB). “It’s a time

for a sales rep to feel as if they have been transported from a distribution house into a CAB Meat Lab.”

The seminar is designed to be anything but a typical meeting.

“High-energy is good for getting their attention and keeping their attention,” Sosa says. “They had high-energy presenters and a lot of interaction.”

Amped up

The evening before, a smaller group is invited to get a close-up view of carcass fabrication, as lead instructor Phil Bass, the brand’s meat scientist, gives a “preview” of what’s to come in the next day.

“Dr. Phil is amped up to talk about beef,” Murray says, emphasizing the rapport he builds with attendees. “What he does with the audience is pretty magical.”

Known for his showmanship with his “Texas butter knife,” he cuts up chuck, loin



► **Above:** “Dr. Phil [Bass] is amped up to talk about beef. What he does with the audience is pretty magical,” says Kelly Murray, assistant director of foodservice marketing for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), emphasizing the rapport Bass builds with attendees at his presentations.

and round primals throughout the course, offering education and jokes along the way.

Out of a whole sirloin he might carve a tri-tip roast, for example.

“The tri-tip is a fairly new cut in certain parts of the country that chefs and distributors might not have experience with,” Murray says. “We show them where it’s cut from, how to prepare it properly — and samples of menu items that include tri-tip. We show attendees how to add it to salads, main dishes, sides, breakfasts, and how to highlight the quality on the menu.”

One session squares in on beef grading. “We put them in the shoes of the USDA grader,” she says. They pass out different ribeye examples to practice on.

“We’ll ask, ‘Would this qualify for *Certified Angus Beef* or not? If not, what competitive product would it end up in?’” Murray says. “That really pushes that sales person to fully understand and grasp competitive products in the market.”

Point of reference

“The meat lab gives the sales people a good foundation,” she says. “We are not making them experts in one day, but we are trying

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Murray came to CAB with six years of experience at a broadline distributor. She knows the challenges associated with the job.

“They are inundated with all sorts of different things to sell, from green beans to mashed potatoes to seafood and beef and everything in between,” she says.

Beef represents about 30% of Sosa’s business, so it’s an important category to know. He’s used the newly acquired knowledge on the street.

“Some things just stuck,” he says. “In this economy and with these prices, [our customers] are looking for alternatives. I was able to get ammunition from the lab.”

In particular, Sosa has used the fact that the flat iron is the second most tender cut and the *teres major* ranks fifth. He’s offered them as possible substitutions for his customers

servicing Peruvian dishes traditionally made with tenderloin, for example.

Murray and the team have empowered sales forces at 10 labs across the country, with more in the works.

Kim Harrison was involved in one when she worked with Pate Dawson–Southern Foods in North Carolina.

“Our sales reps gained visual knowledge about how all the subprimals and underutilized cuts fit together, and came away with a greater understanding,” she says.

Following the event they created internal point-of-sale materials and hosted a customer session to explain some of the meat science topics.

The concept is working. In all cases brand sales are up. Analyzing numbers prior to the meat lab and six months after shows CAB purchases jumped anywhere from 3% with long-time licensees to 69% with newer partners.

Several companies have asked the team to host a Meat Lab 202 of sorts, where they can look at cuts they are underselling according to averages. Once they are identified, they will focus on how to best serve those products and then creatively market them.

“It’s really a re-energized group of sales people,” Murray says. “They feel more comfortable with beef in general. They feel more like they’re a consultant to their customer, and really that’s a great success.”

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Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information and Karoline Rose is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC’s Supply Development Team.*



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