



► **Left:** Todd Kral, Campbell, Neb., is one of more than 350 volunteers that served more than 25,000 Nebraska state fairgoers in just 11 days at the Nebraska Cattlemen's Beef Pit. Cattlemen and allied-industry members from across the state sign up for one of the two shifts that divide each 11-hour operating day.

► **Below:** "The best part of volunteering is working and meeting new people," says Dan Nerud, beef producer from Dorchester, Neb. "It is also rewarding to see your hard work pay off and see where the product ends up."



# Worth the Wait

Thousands line up for Nebraska State Fair 'Beef Pit.'

Story & photos by *Jenny Keyes, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

**S**tate fairs across the country rave about how many foods they can fit on a stick or the latest deep-fried craze, but in Grand Island, Neb., beef is very much "What's for dinner?"

The Nebraska Cattlemen's Beef Pit serves more than 25,000 state fairgoers in just 11 days. Since 2008, their celebrated menu has included *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand prime rib dinners and roast beef sandwiches.

Maybe that's why such long lines wrap around the outside of the building most of

the day. While customers wait, they weave through signs filled with facts and statistics about Nebraska beef.

"Our goal is to promote and educate urban people who come to the fair about the beef industry," says Lee Weide, vice president of operations for the Nebraska Cattlemen. "We aren't in the business to make money. We want to educate and get our product out there."

They are in the business of creating satisfied beef eaters, and that task takes more than 350 volunteers. Cattlemen and allied-industry members from across the state sign up for one of the two shifts that divide each 11-hour operating day.

"The volunteers keep coming back and have been for years," Weide says.

"Pit Bosses" oversee workers, who create an assembly-line system that gets meals to customers fast.

"We have timed it out, and we run a sandwich out the window every 10 to 12 seconds," Weide says.

Dan Nerud, beef producer from Dorchester, Neb., has served four years in a row.

"The best part of volunteering is working and meeting new people," he says. "It is also rewarding to see your hard work pay off and see where the product ends up."

## Serving the best

Long before the prime rib has roasted in the slow cooker just outside the cafeteria-style eatery, and long before hungry people anxiously await their first bite, the planning starts.

"We have always tried to give them the best beef they could get," says Kurt Brockhaus, CAB specialist at distributor-partner Sysco Lincoln. As soon as his company was licensed to sell the brand, he got the Beef Pit on the program.

"In Nebraska, we pride ourselves on having the best beef in America. It was a natural fit, and once they tried it, they loved it," he says.

Nebraska Cattlemen buys 10,000 pounds (lb.) of CAB from Sysco for the state fair. By comparison, Sysco's largest steak house customer goes through

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**— Kurt Brockhaus**



► "People tell us they come to the fair just so they can eat here," says Lee Weide, vice president of operations for the Nebraska Cattlemen. "It is a good, quality meal that is worth the wait."

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500 to 600 lb. in a week, with much larger portions.

“Most steak houses won’t even pull that much,” Brockhaus says.

Sysco works hard all year to buy during the low of the market so the Beef Pit can remain competitive with other food vendors. The extra effort is worth it to get the brand in front of consumers unfamiliar with it, Brockhaus says.

Workers don hats and aprons with the logo, and signs make sure to identify the product.

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for *Certified Angus Beef* in Nebraska, so it’s another place that we can get it in front of them,” he says. “They try it. They love it. They want more of it.”

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Featuring the brand is not the only change cattlemen have seen through the years. The Nebraska Livestock Feeders Association (now part of Cattlemen’s) started the Beef Pit in Lincoln in 1984. As the state fair moved from Lincoln to Grand Island, the food stand did, too. It now enjoys its updated facilities in the fair’s Expo Building, with more seating and a bigger kitchen.

Yet some things will never change.

There’s almost always a line, but Weide says that doesn’t seem to scare people away.

“I have never heard anyone having to wait more than 30 minutes,” he says.

Upon entering the building, customers are greeted by staff and cattlemen from across the state, a chance to put a face to those who raise their food.

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**AJ**

**Editor’s Note:** *Jenny Keyes is industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*