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Making the World Smaller

CAB® brand takes international partners from pasture to plate.

Story & photos by *Katrina Huffstutler* for Certified Angus Beef LLC

The International Masters of Brand Advantages (IMBA) program is all about the aha moments — one after another, at the ranch, the feedyard, the packing plant, the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand’s own Education & Culinary Center. It’s about making concepts click and connections that last.

As the name implies, the program is a spinoff of the brand’s long-running Masters of Brand Advantages (MBA) program, which takes participants on a unique pasture-to-plate journey. The only differences? This event lasts one week instead of three, and it is composed of center-of-the-plate specialists from outside the United States.

The most recent class convened in mid-November. It was the brand’s most global event to date, with 25 students representing 12 countries.

CAB President John Stika says these efforts are vital to the global success of everyone focused on producing high-quality beef.

“From a brand standpoint, with an

increase in volume of our product going into international markets, the value of those sales is only maximized when the level of understanding and education about the product itself, the brand and the process grows, too,” Stika says.

He says while the brand expects its international partners to engage the same way its domestic partners do, the distance can make it challenging. That’s where the IMBA program comes in.

“You can’t do that via conference call,” Stika says. “You can’t do that via PowerPoint presentation. It really takes an experiential-based approach for someone to truly understand why this product is surrounded by such a high level of passion from all segments of the business. That’s what takes a product and makes it a brand.”

The global marketplace is increasingly competitive in the world of branded and quality beef, he says, and continued growth will require an educated, engaged, passionate sales force representing the brand.



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A Lone Star state of mind

The week started in Amarillo, Texas, where participants took an in-depth look at the beef cattle life cycle.

Kara Lee, CAB supply programs manager, says the Texas Panhandle provided a unique opportunity to show the class every facet of the beef community in one outing.

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In just two days’ time, they visited the Bradley 3 Ranch, Amarillo Livestock Auction, Randall County Feedyard and Tyson Amarillo.

Lee says while the language barrier and cultural differences can bring challenges to events like this, the class was not that different from its domestic counterparts.

“We’re all people who care about where our food comes from, how it tastes, and that it’s good for us,” Lee says. “They have the same questions that anybody would. They want to make sure the animals are treated well, and meet the people who are responsible for their care. There’s some personal connection for them, too — everybody loves getting their picture taken with the guy in the cowboy hat. At the end of the day, it’s very cool for them to have the chance to meet the cattlemen and women who are putting meat on the plate.”

Back at HQ

Mid-week, the class travelled to Wooster, Ohio, where presentations focused on beef fabrication, learning beef cuts, how to use the knowledge they gained to overcome sales objections and the many marketing resources available through the brand.

Geof Bednar, CAB international director, says having distributor partners engage at the corporate campus provides an experience that greatly increases their understanding of the resources that are developed to empower them within their markets.

“This ultimately allows our brand partners to head back home better prepared

and confident to successfully be a restaurant’s first choice as a supplier of food products and specifically the *Certified Angus Beef* brand,” Bednar says.

He says this year’s class was not only talented, but extremely passionate about what they do. Each was eager to learn, and their enthusiasm was contagious. As a result, the event was a rousing success.

“All left with new friendships and a renewed understanding that their contribution is meaningful,” Bednar says.

Stika agrees.

“It makes the world smaller,” he says. “When you start meeting people from different parts of the world, it makes it a lot smaller. It’s easier to collaborate with people you’ve met. It’s easier to understand perspectives when you’ve visited directly with them. Those are all the ancillary things that come along with an educational program like we had in the International Masters of Brand Advantages program.”

Stika says that while U.S. cattlemen tend to think of Japan or Mexico or Kuwait as export markets, we need to think of them differently.

“What comes out of an event like this,” Stika says, “is we’re reminded not to think of Japan as a market that is a long way away, but instead as a group of people we have relationships with. People who value the same things about quality beef that we do. The same goes for Mexico, Kuwait and every other country. International markets are full of people, just like domestic markets are.”

He says it’s about finding the things that put us on the same page and that get us



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pulling in the same direction.

“That’s no different than what we do in Des Moines, L.A., New York or Houston,” Stika says. “It takes a little more logistic planning to make it happen, but the approach is the same. The relationships you create are the same; some of them just require an interpreter.”



Editor’s Note: Owner of *Cactus Flower Communications*, Katrina Huffstutler is a freelance writer from Electra, Texas. This story was written on behalf of *Certified Angus Beef LLC*.

