



# Mass Marketing Meets Mail Order



Online availability enables rural Americans to purchase CAB products.

by Jennifer Kiko

**C**ertified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) partners with more than 13,000 businesses in 30 countries, selling in 56 countries last year. Yet, for many rural Americans, purchasing *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand product isn't a simple trip over the river and through the woods. Some consumers travel over the mountain and across the prairie for hundreds of miles to get to the nearest CAB-licensed restaurant or retailer.

For consumers like Tina Adams of Guymon, Okla., there are no quick trips to the local supermarket for CAB steaks.

"My husband, Randy, and I are beef-lovers — it's our main source of protein," Adams says. "We've become big fans of the *Certified Angus Beef* brand. The flavor is unsurpassed and always a treat."

The Adamses don't eat CAB product often, however. Guymon is an agricultural community in the middle of the Oklahoma panhandle. It has a population of approximately 10,000. There are no local CAB retailers or licensed restaurants. Adams makes the 250-mile round trip to Amarillo, Texas, for major shopping and doctor visits. It's also the nearest place to purchase CAB product — unless you think outside the usual channels.

Thanks to a growing mass merchandising trend, consumers have learned to demand product availability and convenience. Many are willing to pay a premium price to have product shipped to their homes — including the CAB brand.

## CAB by mail

A visit to the brand's web site, [www.certifiedangusbeef.com](http://www.certifiedangusbeef.com),

yields a list of nearly 20 licensed partners offering CAB products by mail. Currently, three brand partners are primarily e-commerce (online only) businesses, and 19 companies offer gift catalog sales.

Heartland Steaks, based in Chicago, has been offering the brand since 2003 on its web site, [www.heartlandsteaks.com](http://www.heartlandsteaks.com). Consumers can purchase everything from CAB steak burgers to bacon-wrapped filet mignon.

"The idea for Heartland Steaks started in the fall of 2002 when we were looking to maximize our existing business operations," Joe Miller, company president, says. "We already had the wholesale portion of the distribution chain (Weinstein Wholesale Meats Inc.) licensed in 2001, and had recently acquired a steak-cutting operation that sold to foodservice companies. A retail company

was the next logical step to integrate the others," he says.

Originally, Heartland Steaks targeted consumers in the Midwest who had a history of buying high-end food products online. "We felt that Chicago and the surrounding states provided a large base of potential customers. Plus, the proximity of the customer area would minimize shipping and distribution costs," Miller says.

Heartland Steaks has since refined its approach to focus on direct mail and catalogs — strategies that appeal to a wide range of consumers. Heartland's internet marketing efforts have expanded to include a corporate gift business and monthly steak club.

"Wholesale and foodservice sales are built on personal relationships," Miller says.

"Mail-order marketing strategies are more of a challenge. They're designed to build the brand name and image.

"We put a great deal of time and effort into understanding consumer behavior and then focus our marketing on what appeals emotionally and visually to consumers," he says.

"We had to find the right mix of advertising to educate and sell the customer on the benefits and quality of the *Certified Angus Beef* brand. The comments we've received from Angus producers who found the company on the internet have been very helpful," Miller adds.

## More by mail

Buckhead Beef Co. of Atlanta, Ga., is another wholesale foodservice distributor that has diversified with a gift box



CONTINUED ON PAGE 74

## Mass Marketing Meets Mail Order CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73

program. Brian Phillips, CAB specialist and marketing coordinator at Buckhead, says the program began in 1995 and originally offered corporate holiday gift boxes. Phillips recently set up [www.mysteak.com](http://www.mysteak.com), a fully integrated web site that lets customers choose CAB fresh cuts and make purchases by credit card.

"We're targeting consumers who want premium beef," Phillips says. "Most people go to the grocery store and end up buying short-aged product that can't compare with the aged beef at restaurants. Now they can buy steak-house-quality beef and have it shipped to their homes."

Mark Polzer, CAB foodservice director, says mail order will probably never replace normal consumption habits, but special

occasions and holiday buying will continue to grow mail-order sales.

"The most difficult aspect of mail-order sales is cost," Polzer says. "It's a finite niche market with small-volume sales. Individual cuts of beef are carefully aged, cut to exact portion size and specially packaged. Consumers must pay extra for those services."

On the other hand, consumers are willing to pay for premium products and convenience. "In some cases, the cost of products by mail is nearly double normal retail costs. Most consumers won't pay a premium price for USDA Choice beef," Polzer says. "They are more willing to spend extra dollars to purchase premium beef not readily available to them."

Back in Oklahoma, Adams says she wasn't aware CAB products were available by mail. "It seems the quality of meat available locally has declined, so the opportunity to buy CAB by mail is something we will certainly consider," she says. "I think ordering online is something we will take advantage of in the future."

For a complete list of CAB-by-mail vendors, visit [www.certifiedangusbeef.com](http://www.certifiedangusbeef.com) and click on "Where to Buy," then "Mail Order."



**Editor's Note:** *Jennifer Kiko is a communications specialist for CAB's Marketing-Communications department.*