

What's Cooking at CAB

With Chef Michael Ollier

As you're reading this, I hope to still be soaking up the Texan sun and ruminating on a few big ideas — well, a few big ideas and a major food hangover from a week at an international gathering of culinary professionals. In terms closer to your business, the week after a culinary conference is a food hangover like the bloat after a green-grass binge.

The first week of June will find me in Austin, Texas, for the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) national convention. IACP is a gathering for all culinary types, not just chefs like me.

Food and culinary writers, bloggers, publications; restaurateurs, chefs and foodservice operators; food photographers,

marketers and even nutritionists — basically anyone remotely close to making a living based on the business of food — will gather for a week to learn, grow and share professional ideas.

The cool thing about this conference is the opportunity to interact and network with such a wide range of related but diverse professionals. I spend a lot of time working with chefs, like me, who love to focus on beef, like me. I suppose it's just like your cattle industry — sometimes you get so wrapped up in what's happening on your ranch, in your segment of the industry, that it's hard to keep a broader view.

We do the same thing here in the kitchen. I focus so much on not just beef, but the

Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand, that sometimes it's easy to lose sight of the larger industry. This convention certainly brings that back into perspective.

Last year, I learned quickly to have an “elevator speech” ready. That's a 60- to 90-second explanation of who I am and what I do. It was fascinating to hear the reactions and responses to introducing myself as a corporate chef for CAB. I might be talking to a hotel restaurant's wine purchaser, a vegetable-growers magazine editor or an international travel blogger, and they might not know a thing about beef, much less Certified Angus Beef LLC.

Their reaction to my seemingly obscure job title was usually quickly followed by a reaction to beef, or in some cases, the cattle industry in general. They might instantly profess their die-hard veganism or tell me about the best dang steak they ever had. They might tout the benefits of grass-fed beef, ask how cattle get “certified” or question who in their right mind still eats cancer-causing red meat these days.

No matter how outlandish the reaction, I love letting these conversations flow. It's so valuable to know and understand what other professionals in my industry are thinking and saying about the brand and industry I am involved in — good or bad. I love that this conference is more than just a chance for me to learn from keynote speakers and industry peers — it's a chance to share my story as a chef for the brand and your stories as cattle producers.

I suppose it's the same in your neck of the woods. Attending a cattle industry convention might lend itself to some idea exchange between different segments of the industry; attending a livestock industry convention would certainly open your eyes to the challenges faced in your category. But a conference for any and all who touch in agriculture business on the other hand — wow! Talk about a great opportunity to engage, listen and gather perspective.

That's exactly the opportunity I'm looking forward to at IACP. In the meantime, I'll leave you with a recipe that couldn't be more Texan than if you joined me for it in Austin. Enjoy!

Until next time,
— Chef Michael



Tequila Fajitas

Ingredients:

- 1¾ to 2 lb. CAB® flank steak, cut in half lengthwise
- 2 limes
- ½ cup tequila
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 5 Tbs. olive oil
- 3 jalapeño peppers, cut in half lengthwise and seeded
- 8 flour tortillas
- 1 pint grape tomatoes, halved and/or 2 ripe avocados, diced
- 3 Tbs. Triple Sec
- ¼ cup minced cilantro

Instructions:

1. Zest limes, reserving zest for later. Juice limes.
2. Combine tequila, lime juice, garlic and 3 Tbs. olive oil (2 Tbs. will be used later). Marinate steak in a zipper-locking plastic bag 2 to 4 hours in refrigerator.
3. Preheat grill to high. Remove steak from marinade, discard marinade. Season steak with salt and pepper. Grill or broil steak to desired doneness. Let steak rest 5 minutes and slice thinly across the grain.
4. Grill jalapeños flesh side down until charred and slightly soft; mince and combine with beef.
5. Wrap tortillas in foil and place on top shelf of closed grill to warm.
6. Combine tomatoes/avocados, reserved lime zest and Triple Sec. Heat remaining olive oil in large sauté pan. Turn off heat, add tomato mixture and toss gently. Add beef mixture and cilantro; toss gently to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately with warm tortillas.

