

COWBOY FOR A DAY



Nineteen foodservice salesmen get a taste of ranch life.

by **CAB staff**

They hit the streets with the charge of selling — everything from napkins and cleaning supplies to carrots and *Certified Angus Beef®* (CAB®) brand filet mignons. Carrying a catalog with more than 10,000

stocked items, the job of a foodservice salesperson is no easy assignment.

Specialized knowledge is required for many products. For example, a chef often asks pointed questions about the beef:

Where does it come from? What were the cattle fed? How were they handled at the farm? Being able to answer those questions with confidence can make the difference and the sale.

“We wanted to teach and share the answers to those questions,” explains Marty Berlin, executive account manager for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB). That’s why CAB, Facciola Meat Co. and Sysco Central California organized “Cowboy for a Day” this spring.

Mark and Abbie Nelson, Five Star Land & Livestock, Wilton, Calif., served as hosts for 19 foodservice sales professionals. The day was full of information-sharing and interaction about the day-to-day workings and philosophies of a registered Angus operation.

“We take any opportunity we can to invest in the public’s knowledge of what we do here on the ranch,” Abbie says. “So much gets written by anti-meat activists and other organizations that just isn’t true. We want to set the record straight. Plus, as seedstock producers we can learn a lot by listening to our end users. They are the ones who make our industry happen.”



► Brett Setter, Jackson, Calif., gave an ultrasound demonstration of a yearling bull, providing participants their first look under the hide of a live animal.

► **Left:** Foodservice sales staff learned where beef comes from, what cattle eat and how they are handled on the farm during a Cowboy for a Day event organized by CAB, Facciola Meat Co. and Sysco Central California.

Ray Nicholas, Facciola president, understands the importance of training his sales team as to some of the basics of cattle production.

“It allows us to complete the circle, to know and tell the entire story,” he says. “When we are asked about how the animals are raised or where, or what they are fed, it is nice to have the answers. Being the go-to person, and being the most knowledgeable on our products and sources allows us to have a closer connection with our accounts.”

Firsthand account

On a morning wagon ride around their ranch, the Nelsons explained production details, how they market cattle and the numerous decisions involved in managing a ranch. They fielded questions about animal genetics, health and nutrition, land use, and industry economics.

“Our team was surprised to see that not just one rancher has the animal start to finish,” says T.J. Leonard, CAB specialist at Sysco Central California. “They were amazed at the work and science that goes into giving each animal the best chance to qualify for the *Certified Angus Beef* brand.”

During a tour of the working facilities, the group discussed cattle handling, vaccinations and treatments.

“Natural beef products have been common in the California market for some time,” Berlin says. “The group had lots of questions on the differences in the terms ‘natural’ and ‘organic’ and what was required of the producer. They had other questions on why producers use antibiotics and implants. This was a great way to get them the facts.”

The group learned about cattle genetic evaluation tools that help improve beef products. In an ultrasound demonstration with a yearling bull, technician Brett Setter, Jackson, Calif., provided a first look under the hide of a live animal. Seeing the marbling and the ribeye in real-time proved to be one of the highlights for many attending.

Logan Ipsen, American Angus Association regional manager, and Mark McCully, CAB supply development director, provided overviews of cattle industry segments and beef production basics. Matt MacFarlane, *California Cattleman* magazine, discussed the various ways seedstock can be marketed, and Matt Byrne, California Cattlemen’s Association, discussed legislative topics.

Bob Fox, lobbyist for the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), shared his unique perspective on answering those



► Foodservice professionals learned some roping skills during a demonstration by Colton Campbell.

hard questions that relate to animal welfare. The recent controversy over the Westland/Hallmark Meat Co. cattle handling video added interest in that topic.

Some time to play

The day wasn’t all work, though. Sysco Central California used the trip as an award for their top CAB sales staff. The company rented a stretch Hummer limousine, fully outfitted with a CAB brand logo on the side. After a CAB steak lunch, Norma Fox treated everyone to some of her cowboy poetry. The sales professionals tested their skills in a contest to guess the weight of a bull and learned — or at least observed — new

skills in a roping demonstration by Colton Campbell, the Nelsons’ grandson.

At the end of the day, there will always be challenges, but, thanks to “Cowboy for a Day,” the foodservice professionals from Sysco Central California and Facciola have much better answers to production questions. Having been on the ranch and having talked to cattle producers about how carefully they raise their livestock empowers them with an authority few competitors can match.

“That extra credibility can be just the edge in converting another restaurant to the *Certified Angus Beef* brand,” Berlin notes.

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► Mark Nelson and his wife, Abbie, played host to 19 foodservice professionals, giving them a taste of ranch life at their Wilton, Calif., ranch, Five Star Land and Cattle.