

One Giant Leap for Beef

The 2007 Colvin Scholarship winner shares his winning essay.

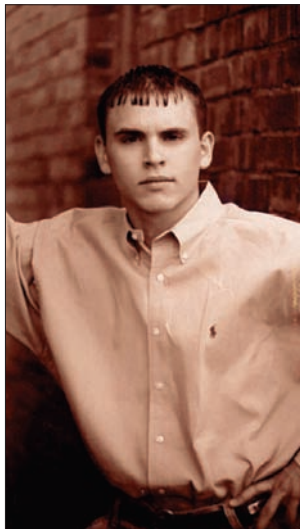
by **Blake Bloomberg**

The American Angus Association has identified a long-range goal of a 30% Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) acceptance rate. What are your suggestions for increasing the acceptance rate and achieving this goal?

Neil Armstrong became a famous American when he landed on the moon. His words of accomplishment spoken that day are still repeated. "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," said Armstrong in 1969.

There have been other breakthroughs in society that could also utter these words. Personally, I feel the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) program has and continues to make this quote a reality in the beef industry around the world.

The *Certified Angus Beef* brand is the largest and oldest branded beef program. Because of the strict quality standards related to this program, *Certified Angus Beef* is a name known worldwide. However, in order to continue meeting these demands, the American Angus Association has a goal of increasing the CAB acceptance rate to 30%.



Blake Bloomberg

There are a number of small steps that can be made to achieve this goal. Some of these suggestions would include more education and further efforts in carcass uniformity. Through this, the *Certified Angus Beef* brand will not only reach a 30% acceptance rate, but also make another giant leap for the beef industry.

Education is an instrumental part of every type of success. CAB is noted as providing the best education to every aspect of the branded beef industry. Yet, there is always more work to be done.

Target producers, feeders

Personally, I feel producers and feeders should be the targeted audiences for further education related to CAB acceptance rates. These two groups largely control the end product and its likelihood to qualify as CAB.

Producers today have more methods to assist them in selection and breeding quality than ever before. The American Angus Association provides expected progeny differences (EPDs) for registered cattle, which help producers make logical breeding decisions when selecting to enhance carcass quality. There is no excuse these days for Angus cattle to genetically fall short in terms of carcass acceptance.

However, registered breeders are not the only producers that education should be focused on. Commercial producers need to be educated on the benefits of selecting Angus cattle with genetics to assist in carcass acceptance. Also, educating these breeders on how other breeds impact carcass quality is vital. Dairy and *Bos indicus* type cattle should be avoided in breeding decisions. This is because lack of muscling and/or poor marbling genetics would result, both restricting cattle from qualifying as CAB.

With the strict quality standards for the CAB brand, genetics are the first step to increasing acceptance rates. With the new AngusSource® program to assist in

identifying Angus-type cattle at harvest, I feel we will see a slight increase in cattle striving to meet the remainder of CAB's carcass specifications. Because Angus genetics are recognized as exceptional in carcass quality, the AngusSource program will provide another step in reaching the acceptance rate goal.

Additionally, education should be focused on how health and management largely impact beef cattle's final quality. Feedlots play a vital role in this area. Nutrition and care during the final months of a calf's life directly affect carcass quality. Marbling remains the single specification



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2007 Colvin Scholarship winners

First place, \$2,500 scholarship

Blake Bloomberg, Texas A&M University

\$2,000 scholarship

Garrett Lampe, Kansas State University

\$1,000 scholarships

Kyle Grim, Pennsylvania State University

Kindra Wood, Auburn University

Dustin Volek, South Dakota State University

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that is the hardest for cattle to qualify as CAB.

Larry Corah, vice president for Certified Angus Beef, said, "It will always be a challenge for cattle to meet the CAB marbling specifications, simply because the brand demands the best in Angus cattle."

However, education is not the only step for acceptance rates to reach 30%. The beef industry is facing issues with carcass uniformity. This relates directly to CAB acceptance. With the specification CAB has listed for Angus-type cattle to qualify, breeders and feeders working to reach this brand should strive for more uniformity with their cattle. Because of this, CAB has recently made additions to its specifications as it relates to uniformity.

"In place of a longstanding Yield Grade (YG) 3.9 limit, the brand will use a more specific consistency requirement in the future," according to CAB. "Finished cattle weights have increased steadily, and beef fabrication styles have evolved in the 28 years since CAB was founded. The changes will address uniformity issues that technology has been unable to control."

Uniformity is key

Breeding decisions and feeding choices lay the foundation for carcass uniformity. However, this industry still needs to work on the main cause in lack of uniformity in beef carcasses — marbling.

Research has shown a variety of reasons cattle have failed in reaching the desired marbling degree. Health has a major affect on quality grade. Iowa State University studies show that calves treated two or more times for bovine respiratory disease (BRD) are over 30% less likely to grade Prime or Choice.

Additionally, with less manpower available in feedlots today, sick cattle go untreated for longer periods of time. This added stress results in a decrease in marbling, preventing cattle from harvesting Modest or higher, which qualifies for CAB.

Nutrition is also playing a role in carcass uniformity, or lack thereof. Kansas State University research shows distilled feedstuffs, such as ethanol byproducts, can also reduce marbling.

With more effort focused on carcass uniformity, more Angus-type cattle will

meet the remaining carcass specification to qualify as CAB. Quite simply, carcass uniformity works in tandem with education.

Selecting cattle that excel in carcass EPDs, providing proper management and feeding cattle to desired end points (keeping uniformity in mind) will all collectively assist in raising the CAB acceptance rate.

All beef cattle enthusiasts should be educated on what factors play a role in CAB acceptance. Additionally, cattlemen should strive to implement genetics and management to enable their cattle to qualify as CAB.

Armstrong's words of accomplishments can be heard again today in the branded beef industry. With further education focused on genetic selection and nutrition, along with the importance of pursuing carcass uniformity, Certified Angus Beef will meet the American Angus Association's goal of 30% acceptance rates. This small step for Certified Angus Beef will mark another giant leap for the beef industry.

