

Jerry and Mike to the Rescue

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CAB Impact Award recalls 1978-1979 fight to reinstate the brand.

Thirty-eight years after the *Certified Angus Beef*®

(CAB®) brand's first sale drew so much press that

USDA canceled what it had just approved, the

brand was honored with the Don L. Good Impact Award from Kansas State University (K-State).

The Ohio-based company reopened six months after its carcass stamp was confiscated, and went on to sell more than a billion pounds in 2016. Why did a K-State award single out CAB? Because it exemplifies “game changer” impact, and many people in its history hold degrees from the university.

CAB President John Stika introduced several current and former staff at the K-State Animal Sciences and Industry Family & Friends Reunion last fall, but only two of those never actually worked for the brand. They are part of “the rest of the story.”

Michigan native Jerry Lipsey is best known as a longtime CEO of the American Simmental Association. He spent nearly as many years prior to that as a meat science professor at the University of Missouri (MU). Next to him in photos from that evening is Oklahoma native Mike May, a retired USDA Standardization Branch Chief. Both earned doctorates from K-State, but their CAB connections are not well-known.

Meet at 10

“You want to hear a story?” the ever-energetic Lipsey asks.

Below: In accepting the K-State Don L. Good Impact Award on behalf of the CAB program, CAB President John Stika said its achievement was due to the sum of its parts. “This is a celebration of an opportunity to bring an industry together focused on one thing, and that’s on delivering quality to consumers worldwide.”





PHOTOS BY HEIDI ANDERSON

Kansas State University alumni Mike May (left) and Jerry Lipsey (right) played a large role in fighting to reinstate the CAB® brand after USDA had pulled the plug.

Before joining the MU faculty, he started his career in 1978 as director of junior activities for the American Angus Association and ramped up the focus on the carcass side. Association Executive Director C.K. Allen was new that year, too.

“One morning in early November, I get to work and C.K. said he wanted to meet with me, to come to his office at 10 o’clock,” Lipsey recalls. “‘We’re going to talk about some things,’ he said. Well, I didn’t know what to think, but got some ideas together.”

Those who know CAB history know that Nov. 1, 1978, marked the cancellation of the new program, just two weeks after that first pound was sold at Renzetti’s IGA in Columbus, Ohio. Almost nobody knew about that the week it happened.

“I walked into his office at 10 and said you know, we’ve got these things coming up, there’s an education seminar and an internship we’re setting up — but he

waived me off and said, paraphrasing now because that was a long time ago: That’s nice, but that’s not why you’re here ...

“You can kind of see how that was awkward. I thought, oh my gosh, what exactly does that mean, but said what exactly can I do for you? He said come back at 1 o’clock.”

Lipsey worried through the rest of the morning and had little appetite for lunch.

A new project

“I thought I was ready for anything, but when I walked back into C.K.’s office at 1, there stood Mick Colvin and Fred Johnson (CAB leaders from Ohio). C.K. said, ‘Jerry, we want to talk about this.’ They knew I had a background in meat science and wanted to bring me up to speed on branding and what had happened.”

They asked Lipsey if he ever bought

bread in the grocery store and if he recalled the brand. He did. They asked if he ever wondered why beef wasn’t branded.

“I was kind of bewildered at first, but then we talked about CAB and what was going on with USDA and the cancellation,” Lipsey says. “Did I know Mike May, the new chief of standardization? Yes, because we were at K-State getting our Ph.D.s

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in meat science at the same time. They decided I should come to Washington with them the next week.”

May stands by his old friend at the K-State event these many years later and joins in the story.

“You have to remember, this was shortly after the grading changes, and a big reason

behind CAB coming in then,” May says. “Jerry called me and asked —”

“I asked how or if USDA certified any meat at the time,” Lipsey’s flashback chimes in, “and didn’t that call for cooperation between the Standardization and Grading branches?”

“I said we certified meat as acceptable

for the military,” May continues. “We wrote the specifications and Grading carried out the program. You see, Mick [Colvin] had worked with Bob VanStavern at Ohio State, and they had some good ideas. They asked us if their program would work, and I said, yes, it will be a great product.”

USDA is a big organization, and not everybody got the memo on CAB. Those who did had mixed opinions.

“The fly in the ointment was that you had to identify live animals and carry that through to the carcass, and Inspection raised that concern,” May says, “but I said they have a workable plan. I said, look, USDA has been beat up over flattening the Choice grade, and this will be good for the industry.”

He didn’t want to admit to “lobbying” on behalf of the fledgling brand, but, “there had to be a little salesmanship with our superiors at USDA.”

One of those was Carol Tucker-Foreman, assistant secretary for food and consumer services, widely credited with pulling the plug on CAB at the time, though not a matter of record.

“Going to Washington,” Lipsey says, “I thought we would be well-received. We walked into the first office and reception said to go on to another office. Reception there sent us to a third office, where we waited until she (Tucker-Foreman) walked in.

“I think you’re deceiving consumers, and I’m not going to stand for it,” Lipsey recalls her saying. “She didn’t ask for any input or ask us any questions. It was an extremely brief meeting.”

However, there were other meetings with May as an ally, to go with the many letters Allen, Colvin and Johnson wrote. Congressional representatives and senators from all over weighed in after hearing from constituents.

“I can’t tell you how we finally convinced the assistant secretary, as she thought Inspection should have no role in marketing,” May says. “I told her their role is; they are the only branch that could take on that role. Somebody well above me got through to her.”

Stika summarized: “The argument that USDA had a legal obligation to help producers monitor the brand’s implementation was accepted.”

Objective met

Six months to the day after the first pound of CAB sold, the brand was open for business again. That week, in April 1979, new doors opened in Columbia, Mo., too, where Lipsey was interviewing for a staff position at MU. He was at Diggs Packing when it signed on as the second licensed processor, and at Eastlake IGA in town when it became the first retailer west of the Mississippi to sell CAB.

In remarks while accepting the Impact award, Stika noted CAB has no cattle or beef, just a logo licensed for use by its 18,000 partners on behalf of Angus producers.

“If an organization that only owns this can be recognized for having an impact, then obviously it’s because of the sum of its parts, the collection of people working together,” he said. “This is a celebration of an opportunity to bring an industry together focused on one thing, and that’s on delivering quality to consumers worldwide.”

