



# Your Link to

by **NICOLE LANE ERCEG**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*



## Culinary experiences boost brand demand

“Wow.”

It’s a common reaction from folks who enter the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Culinary Center for the first time — and they haven’t even tried the beef yet.

Each week — nearly every day — the Center hosts beef professionals from across the industry and around the world. Chefs and butchers, retail brand partners, deli managers and more visit this enticing resource at the brand’s headquarters in Wooster, Ohio, to learn how to make the best beef better.

To these hundreds of visitors who come to learn, the CAB culinary team delivers merchandising ideas for the retail case, and insight on supply, pricing, product yields and other ideas to grow sales and profitability.

It’s a big production, worthy of the initial awe the Center inspires. Yet does the experience actually lead to more pounds sold, more profit for Angus producers and their 19,000 partners?

Diana Clark, meat scientist for the

brand, wanted to know. In 2016, she began studying sales data for groups that visit the Center, analyzing pounds sold before and after their visits.

### A valuable resource

She found that a trip to Wooster is a worthwhile investment — both for the customer and the brand. Her data show these educational events result in growth of CAB purchases for most partners.

After a first visit in 2016, one international retail chain purchased an additional 1.3 million pounds (lb.) of the brand and returned for another visit in 2017. Three months following their visit, a Florida-based steak house was purchasing an extra 4 tons of the brand compared to the previous year.

“They are doing more here than just cooking beef,” says Clark. “They learn how to use the product in new and innovative ways that drive profitability for their specific businesses.”

Sharbel Boutros, the butcher and

meat manager for Chuppa’s Marketplace, attended a Chef Summit event at the Culinary Center. Although he’s not a chef, he came looking for new ideas on how to improve the meat counter at his company’s Cleveland, Ohio,-based grocery store.

“We’re expanding our meatcase and adding more cuts to it,” says Boutros. “This is why I wanted to visit the Center, to see what other cuts I could use, to add to what we have.”

With today’s cattle supply numbers on the rise, programs that connect beef retailers with innovative marketing ideas and drive demand for CAB aren’t just good news for the brand; they’re great news for cattlemen focused on high-quality beef.

Every new dollar in the cattle business comes from beef consumers.

What if we could set up an enterprise that multiplies those dollars? That’s what the Culinary Center does, according to Clark and CAB Senior Vice President Brent Eichar.

It’s a continuous chain reaction of new demand for the brand.

“Ultimately, it generates more demand for Angus cattlemen,” Eichar says. “Every dollar we invest in the Culinary Center has a sevenfold return on its impact for our mission. If we can get a retail company or restaurant there, our close rate is greater than 75%, and the only reason it’s not more like 100% is we don’t always have the key decision-maker along.”

The hands-on, interactive education at the Center gets creativity flowing. It helps retailers, chefs and restaurateurs find innovative ways to engage consumers with high-quality beef and inventive marketing.

It also opens doors to new partners. Many prospects visit the Center before becoming a licensed brand venue. When key personnel from one large golf resort came to partake in the experience, the result was more than just another high-end restaurant signing on to carry the brand and logo — it added 30,000 lb. to CAB sales last year.

Of the 305 customers analyzed in her data, Clark found additional purchases of CAB product in three months following their visit came to 2,166,228 lb. over the previous year. Extended to the full year, those purchases grew by 3,723,145 lb. That’s a lot of beef — and more than just a few truckloads of high-quality Angus cattle.

Clark also found those added pounds aren’t just coming from middle meats. By

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helping retailers find ways to cook and sell different cuts, CAB staff enable them to merchandise less-popular beef items in ways that still provide a great eating experience.

“The increased pounds are really an increase in the products we’ve pushed at the Culinary Center,” says Clark. “Their ribeye purchases remain consistent, but we’ll see their purchases of end meats spike. We use their time here to suggest opportunities that add value to the entire carcass.”

### Expanding the reach

This entire demand-generating system runs at no cost to the cattleman. Since CAB is a not-for-profit subsidiary of the American Angus Association, licensed packer fees fund all brand initiatives — like the Culinary Center. That lets added premiums flow back to the ranch.

It’s been nearly six years since the Center opened its doors and began providing experiences to help maximize the value of high-quality beef. The rationale then as now resonates through the beef community.

Starting at the ranch, the best beef genetics in the world may fall short if the next owner doesn’t realize what he or she has and maintain the full potential for excellence. The same risk waits at every step in the supply chain unless we communicate and work together to add value to high-quality Angus cattle.

The Center was expanded last year to include a larger meat-processing room, full formal dining room and gift shop, all providing more space for learning, adding value and enjoying the process.

As beef-selling businesses become partners and find new ways to sell more of the best beef, it’s not just something they’ll smile about when they see more black ink on the bottom line. Their customers are smiling and enjoying the awesome beef that keeps them coming back for more. The pull-through demand might even garner a “Wow” response from the starting point for all this: the quality-focused Angus producer.

**Editor’s Note:** *Nicole Lane Erceg is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*



**Fig. 1: Overall growth after Culinary Center visit**

