

## THE VERY BEST BEEF: TO FINISH RIGHT, START RIGHT

Certified Angus Beef delivered message on brand successes and progress at Angus Convention.

by Lindsay Graber Runft, Certified Angus Beef

Before the very best beef can be placed on a consumer's plate, Angus breeders must do their job and do it well. High-quality genetics, progressive management practices and stewardship of the land all come into play — but that's not news. It's the foundation for producing Certified Angus Beef® (CAB) brand premium product.

"If you want to finish right, you have to start right," said Bruce Cobb, executive vice president of production at CAB.

Through a growing brand acceptance rate (currently at 35.5% of evaluated carcasses) and research-proven strong stewardship practices, Angus breeders are starting right.

To finish right, CAB is listening to its customers on sustainability and acting on findings, while also adjusting its marketing to meet evolving consumer interests and expectations.

In a session on consumer perspectives at the 2022 Angus Convention, Cobb and Nicole Erceg, CAB director of communications, addressed sustainability, positioning the brand for the current consumer target market and brand sales the past fiscal year. To further discuss

sustainability, Erceg was joined by panelists with varied perspectives from the supply chain: Danette Amstein, Midan Marketing; Abram Babcock, Adams Land and Cattle; Jonathan Perry, Deer Valley Farms and past chairman of the CAB Board of Directors; and Jessica Willingham, Sysco Foods.

### BUILDING CONSUMER TRUST THROUGH SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY

While taste is still the most important attribute, consumer expectations are expanding, with an

increased emphasis placed on how beef is sourced. In response to sourcing questions from consumers, voiced through the brand's customers, CAB is engaging with its supply chain.

Although some brand customers have made sizable sustainability commitments, they are not aiming to dictate producer production practices. Instead, those customers are interested in learning more about how CAB, and beef producers, are engaged in sustainability.

"Not only are consumers saying



Beef industry stakeholders, representing various segments of the supply chain and beyond, joined Nicole Erceg on stage to discuss sustainability.

sustainability is important in research, but they're also voting with their pocketbooks," Amstein said.

Looking to the Sustainability Perceptions and Proof Point Assessment (Dynata Platforms, 2021), the largest percentage of consumers surveyed consider animal welfare to be the most important piece of sustainability. At 45%, animal welfare carried more weight than beef affordability, land use, climate change, carbon footprint and water usage.

"Sustainability is all about continuous improvement," Babcock said. "How do we wake up and get better?"

Though Adams Land and Cattle focuses on multiple facets of sustainability, it all boils down to transferring data through the supply chain and operations receiving credit for work that is already being done. Progress in practice is necessary.

To Amstein, the number one gateway to consumers — when talking sustainability — is animal welfare. As a researcher who has studied consumer perception of

sustainability in the beef industry for multiple years, Amstein understands that those buying beef have an elevated interest in how animals are cared for through the supply chain and the level of trust with producers.

"Consumers trust producers, but they need verification," Perry said.

To provide verification to consumers on animal welfare practices, CAB launched the "Cut the Bull" campaign, promoting a cattle care initiative that encourages Angus breeders to complete Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification. The BQA program is reputable, and consumers trust certifications. Therefore, this creates a tool for validating appropriate management practices and giving producers credit for caring for their animals the right way.

From National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) research, via the Beef Checkoff, only 44% of consumers surveyed had positive or strongly positive perceptions about how cattle are raised prior to learning about the BQA program. After learning more about BQA, positive

perceptions of cattle production increased to 70% of consumers.

While the brand understands that animal welfare is a top priority for the consumer, CAB is also in tune with its business customers' climate commitments and how those commitments affect the brand's supply chain. Erceg said to position the brand for continued demand, it's important to communicate how CAB brand products are produced without detrimental effects on the environment.

"Farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists," Willingham said.

Sysco Foods, a supply chain partner of CAB, is approaching sustainability through a mission of caring for people, sourcing products responsibly and respecting the planet. Willingham encouraged producers to not be afraid of telling their operation's positive production story, bridging consumers' interest in how their food is raised and Sysco's sustainability commitment.

To further its efforts, CAB

*Continued on page 128*



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**— ABRAM BABCOCK**

## WORKING GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE UPDATE

Just one year after launching, the Working Grasslands Conservation Initiative:

- Prevented emissions and sequestered the amount of carbon equivalent to 9,241 passenger cars.
- Prevented 77,748 megagrams of soil erosion. That amount would allow you to cover 76 acres with 1 foot of topsoil.
- Protected and restored about 10,000 acre-feet of annual water storage. This is equivalent to more than 5,000 Olympic swimming pools.
- Protected 130,000 acres of grasslands, working with 257 landowners across all programs in the project.

The Very Best Beef: To Finish Right, Start Right *continued from page 127*

launched the Working Grasslands Conservation Initiative. By collaborating with Ducks Unlimited, CAB can gain insight into how cattle play a role in ecosystems through research data gathered. Currently focused in North and South Dakota, an area important to waterfowl, the voluntary program aims to provide outcomes in four areas: preserving working grasslands, sequestering carbon, increasing biodiversity and maintaining clean water resources.

Through the Working Grasslands Conservation Initiative, CAB will continue to position the brand as a premium product by showing a direct investment in the environmental effect of its supply chain. **A**



## BEEF ON THE BIG STAGE

In response to a changing consumer demographic, the brand is changing the way it showcases the very best beef. The first step? Making CAB cool with younger generations.

"Building our cultural clout has actual value," Erceg said.

When viewed as a "cool" brand, consumers are more apt to increase their *Certified Angus Beef*® brand product purchases, tell friends and family about it and become loyal to the brand, thus increasing demand for the best beef. To get there, CAB took beef where it has never been before — cliffside, for an extreme dining experience.

With a celebrity, some foodie influencers and Angus rancher, Ty Walter, on hand, CAB executed a high-stakes event, preparing and serving premium beef on the edge of the Rocky Mountains. Coined "Beef Takes You There," the campaign garnered significant positive publicity for the brand, and beef in general, with 600 media placements and 1.1 billion impressions.



**"Building our cultural clout has actual value."**

**— NICOLE ERCEG**