



Beef Blitz

Product tour gives producers insight into what happens between ranch gate and consumer plate.

Photos & story by
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“If you were planning on seeing live cattle today, you’re on the wrong

bus,” Justin Sexten said with a grin. The supply development director for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand applied his natural candor to create laughter, but it was fact. Thankfully, the cattlemen and women representing a wide range of

the country were there on purpose — to see what goes on after cattle are harvested and before a consumer enjoys the fruits of their labor.

A drive into Dallas allowed time for questions such as where local grocery stores source their CAB

product and how much of a demand there really is for grass-finished beef. Sexten, along with fellow CAB staffer Sara Scott expanded on those inquiries, offering prizes and insight along the way.

The first stop on the tour was

Hot trends in BBQ

“I don’t feed on Christmas. That’s about the only thing I do different than y’all,” Joe Risky said to a room of cattlemen.

The remark brought laughter after the owner of Joe Risky’s Barbeque, and Jay Risky, Buckhead Beef Dallas, shed light on their life and legacy. The Texas brothers were part of an Angus University session at the Angus Convention in Fort Worth, titled “Hot Trends in BBQ.”

It may be common to point to BBQ (and it is common to refer to barbecue by those letters in Texas) as a growing trend, but for the Risky brothers, it’s been there since the beginning. Family started the Texas legend more than 75 years ago, now with eight locations in Fort Worth.

“We’re maybe desensitized from this as a trend because it’s all we’ve done and what we do,” Joe said. As

the younger of the two, he’s a fourth-generation pitmaster; his brother has committed decades to selling beef product through Buckhead, previously Freedman Meats.

Speaking of their deep-rooted history and what’s now an area to gain leverage in the beef arena, Jay said his great-grandmother started cooking brisket in 1927 as a way to differentiate from competitors, “because others wouldn’t have anything to do with it. They’d throw it out.”

The most popular cut used by pitmasters and



Brothers in barbecue, Jay and Joe (left) Risky took plenty of questions about the industry they’ve known since birth, as well as what it means for cattle producers raising quality beef. CAB’s Mark McCully (right) moderated the session at the 2017 Angus Convention.

BBQ aficionados alike, today brisket sales drive one of the fastest-growing segments of foodservice. Currently, Buckhead purchases some 12,000 pounds (lb.) of brisket a week, just to go into burgers. In 2002, that number was zero.

“Today, at \$2.50-per-pound briskets, we’ve decided it’s a good thing to put briskets in a patty,” Jay said.

That demand isn’t without its costs, though, Joe says. For a brisket guy, it can be an uphill battle that you tackle regardless.

“The popularity of the brisket with the market, it produced a perfect storm,” he said. Take almost 60 lb. of a raw brisket from one animal

Buckhead Beef Dallas, a specialty processing division of Sysco. The longtime processor sends product across the country as one of 17 Sysco facilities, and it supplies local CAB partners. It ships roughly 700,000 pounds (lb.) of product per week on average. Attendees met with Jay Risky, Buckhead's national sales manager, and members of his team before touring the facility to get a closer look at production.

The tour groups traveled through the storage facility before stepping onto the fabrication and packaging rooms. While there, attendees observed USDA graders pulling random product to ensure the strict guidelines for specifications were met. They were encouraged to ask questions, and heard from people on the line about the many steps it takes for a product to get to an end user.

Risky said they'll process 40 million lb. or 100 million servings out of the facility in a year, a quarter of that CAB. Beef makes up 88% of their volume.

"Part of our job at CAB is to market the entire carcass," Scott said. "We can't just pick and choose what popular cuts we want. Rather, through carcass utilization, we help bring value to the entire carcass and put dollars back into the industry."

All that beef talk left the tour group longing for lunch, so a stop at the CAB-licensed Silver Fox Steakhouse was met with high praise.

Before heading back to Fort Worth, attendees got a chance to step inside a Texas-based Brookshire's Food & Pharmacy where they visited with Byron Phillips, general manager, and Steven Butler, certified market manager, to learn what customers look for when they visit the meat counter.

The CAB-sponsored Beef Blitz Product Tour, Nov. 3, preceded the 2017 Angus Convention, Nov. 4-6 in Fort

Worth, Texas. It was the highest-attended conference to date.



Editor's Note: *Laura Conaway is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*



Cattlemen and women representing a wide range of the country participated in a tour to see what goes on after cattle are harvested and before a consumer enjoys the fruits of their labor. The tour included a lunch stop at the CAB-licensed Silver Fox Steakhouse.

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and cook it and you're down to 30 lb. Trim it and you'll lose another 50%.

"Next thing we know, we have a \$10-per-pound product," Joe says. "It's a loss, but people like it, so it's what we do. Everybody loves brisket."

One way to save some of those pounds lost was to switch from using USDA Choice to *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand Prime, Joe said. That change resulted in 4% less loss "because there's better fat" with the higher-quality carcasses. That drives overall demand for Angus cattle.

"There's a price difference but there's a big difference in the product, too," he said.

Joe said he'll be there to cook it, just as long as the ranchers keep raising the beef to supply it.

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