

# CAB CONNECTION

## Always innovating with consumer demand in mind

by Bruce Cobb, Certified Angus Beef LLC



My middle son has been filling the long summer by providing one-on-one baseball and softball hitting lessons. He works with boys and girls ages 8 to 16 to perfect their game. While the age range is wide, their dreams are all focused on the singular goal of blasting one over the fence for their team in a game.

Parents embrace the same dream for their aspiring young ball players.

Earlier this summer, my son wrapped up a typical lesson by saying he looked forward to seeing the 9-year-old the next week to continue fine-tuning his swing.

“Well, he will not be returning next week,” responded the mom.

Considering it was only the player’s third lesson, my son asked, “Is it something I did? Any issues we can work through?”

“Oh, no, no,” she reassured. “Everything is great. It’s just that his swing is fixed. Thank you for helping him learn to hit.”

How often do we think our swing is fixed, when we really don’t know? Baseball, as with many things in life, presents an opportunity to continually get better.

### Room for improvement

That’s where we are in the beef industry. It’s never really fixed, but rather a constant quest to blast one over the fence to meet consumer expectations. There’s always an opportunity to do better, and that’s

what the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand has been doing since 1978. When Mick Colvin and Bobby “Dr. Bob” VanStavern set up the specifications for this program, they had to know the first specs would need to evolve with consumer demand.

They were improving consistency and quality and expected the brand to continue doing that to meet needs into the future.

### Base for improvement

In the 1980s we started gathering data we internally refer to as our “consist study.” It’s a large volume of carcass data — 2.8 million in the last one — that we analyze “seven ways to Sunday” in pursuit of excellence for the brand.

It allows us to learn more about the product so we can deliver a wonderful experience time after time.

Most recently our meat scientists and packing team started researching possible innovations in the way we certify carcasses through the program’s specifications. We considered a multitude of options to how the brand could be improved. Through a series of “what ifs” applied to the data, the specifications were evaluated to determine how we could continue being the best in the eyes of the consumer.

We talked about allowing other cuts to qualify when carcasses meet all specifications except for the ribeye area falling outside of our



Most recently our meat scientists and packing team started researching possible innovations in the way we certify carcasses through the program’s specifications. Current technology in carcass grading and fabrication now allow certification strategies that go beyond whole carcasses only.

10- to 16-square-inch (in.) size requirement. Current technology in carcass grading and fabrication now allow certification strategies that go beyond whole carcasses only.

That ribeye-area specification is

critical for controlling consistency in most middle meats from the rib and loin, but some cuts — like the tenderloin, *teres major* and skirt steaks — benefit from greater size. Furthermore, the limit on hot carcass weight keeps a general limit on cut size.

Certifying those cuts other than ribeye and strips from outside the 10- to 16-in. range could expand the total supply for the brand by 3%, and allow future adjustments to add consistency and volume beyond the whole-carcass approach.

## CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF LLC

206 Riffel Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-8588; 330-345-2333; fax: 330-345-0808; website: [www.cabcattle.com](http://www.cabcattle.com)

**John Stika**, president  
**Brent Eichar**, senior executive vice president, operations and finance  
**Tracey Erickson**, executive vice president, marketing  
**Bruce Cobb**, executive vice president, production  
**Steve Ringle**, executive vice president, business development

**Pam Cottrell**, senior vice president, people and culture

### SUPPLY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

**Marilyn Conley**, administrative assistant  
**Kara Lee**, production brand manager, Leavenworth, Kan.  
**Paul Dykstra**, beef cattle specialist, Chappell, Neb.

### PRODUCER COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

**Miranda Reiman**, director, Cozad, Neb.  
**Steve Suther**, senior editor, Onaga, Kan.  
**Abbie Burnett**, specialist  
**Morgan Marley**, specialist

Continued on page 64

That strategy would matter to every segment in a supply chain where the demand for CAB keeps expanding. By continually shaping the brand's relevance to that demand, stakeholders up and down the chain can experience the difference that the brand offers.

**By continually shaping the brand's relevance to that demand, stakeholders up and down the chain can experience the difference that the brand offers.**

At its June meeting, our Board of Directors gave us the nod to start exploring options, to have conversations and to do a lot more digging into the data. That's what leadership looks like in the branded-beef business.

When we lead in delivering quality and quantity to our partners, it allows the brand to deliver premiums to those who produce it.

## Staying relevant

Another reason we look at that data is to be sure we remain relevant.

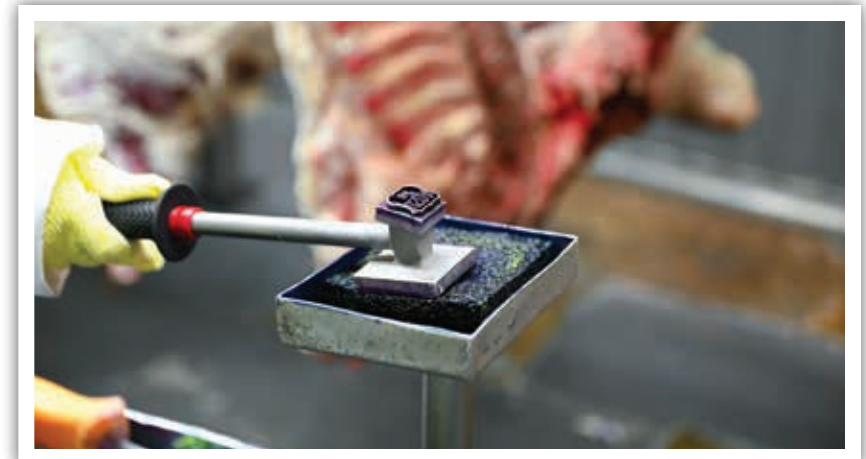
We are relevant because we don't argue with the realities of the industry. We influence where we can and adjust where we have to.

For example, in 2014 we increased our hot carcass weight specification by 50 pounds (lb.), up to 1,050 lb. As the cattle trended larger and larger in the United States, we could not become obsolete simply because we weren't willing to change.

Carcass weight is an area we'll continue to monitor and adjust as needed in the future.

We have to add value at every step in the chain. That is a foundational idea from which we'll never back away.

Our meetings this spring reviewed how brand leadership through the years has had a positive influence on producers, consumers and



We are relevant because we don't argue with the realities of the industry. We influence where we can and adjust where we have to. We have to add value at every step in the chain. That is a foundational idea from which we'll never back away.

licensees. The process of reviewing our specifications is like studying video of our swing and hitting techniques. That process of creating and capturing new value is achieved through science, technology and a passion for excellence. Since starting with the brand in March, it has been a privilege to personally observe the passionate leadership that has been a cornerstone of progress in the beef business.

Our hitting just continues to get better and better through the never-ending lessons and chasing the dream of scoring runs with consumers. |

Editor's note: This column is a regular column authored by staff of Certified Angus Beef LLC to provide insights into the brand and how commercial cattlemen, feeders, packers and consumers can profit from its high-quality target. Bruce Cobb is executive vice president of production for the brand.