

# Your Questions About CAB<sup>®</sup> Answered

Story by  
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Through phone calls, e-mail and personal visits, many commercial cattlemen have asked questions about Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) over the past year. Here are some of the recurring ones, with answers and contact information for follow-up or more details.

**Q** How does CAB function?

**A** CAB is a nonprofit, limited-liability company (LLC) that owns only its trademark and operates a program. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the American Angus Association, CAB functions independently with the guidance of a nine-member board of directors that includes five members of the Association Board.

CAB pursues its mission — to increase demand for Angus cattle through its branded beef program — by licensing use of the trademark. Licensees include restaurants, retailers, foodservice distributors, retailers, packers and feedlots.

**Q** How do I participate in CAB?

**A** Work to improve the carcass quality of your Angus and Angus-cross cattle. It's that simple, and anyone with that goal is part of the CAB Program. But you can participate at a higher level through cooperative integration, becoming part of a network with your Angus seedstock supplier to channel production into licensed CAB feedlots.

Participating in the program may not be as simple as merely "signing up" — as many producers would prefer — because it is a long-term process. There are no commitments other than the ones you make because of market forces. The *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>™</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) carcass target is generally the highest value and most logical product target for most cattle that are at least 50% Angus genetically.

**Q** How do I certify my Angus herd?

**A** No herds are "certified" and no living animals are actually "Certified Angus Beef." CAB is the trademark for Angus beef product that, after meeting the live specifications, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) verifies as meeting eight carcass specifications. The most difficult carcass specification to meet is a quality grade of middle-Choice or higher.

Last year, some 9 million fed cattle that appeared to be Angus-type were evaluated at the 32 licensed CAB processing plants across the United States, and 1.9 million of those cattle had carcasses that met the specifications and became CAB product. When those 1.9 million head were sold to packers, the owners realized a premium if they sold them through some form of value-based marketing.

**Q** How do we market CAB cattle? Does CAB buy on contract? Does it cost to be able to sell to licensed CAB packers?

**A** CAB doesn't buy cattle; its licensed packers — including IBP, ConAgra (Monfort), Excel and National — do, in all the ways packers can buy. CAB serves to build demand for your cattle, but it cannot get involved in actually marketing them. Thanks to 22 years of building demand, packers increased premiums for CAB-accepted carcasses from nothing early in the 1990s to as much as \$4 and \$5/hundredweight (cwt.) now.

**Q** How do we acquire "CAB quality" cattle?

**A** To get cattle with a greater-than-average chance of producing CAB-accepted carcasses, start with genetics capable of achieving the higher quality grades. There are a lot of potential rewards and opportunities for profit in balanced im-

provement along the way. Look at individual performance and carcass records associated with the cattle before buying.

**Q** How can I feed my 20 steers in the CAB Program?

**A** In the custom-feeding world, 20 head is too small for most feedlots, but somebody may have a partial pen. Another option is to find someone else with similar cattle and feed them in a commingled pen with individual- or owner-identification (ID) intact.

Cattle from any feedlot can enter the CAB Program if they qualify at slaughter, provided they are sold to a CAB-licensed packer. However, you must generally ask for value-based marketing to get paid CAB premiums on cattle that make the grade. There are also discounts for cattle that are too fat, too thin, too heavy, too light, etc., which can outweigh your premiums, so work with your feedlot and seedstock supplier on fine-tuning.

While cattle from any feedlot can get into CAB, there are 51 specially licensed CAB feedlots across the country that have ongoing training to better optimize the number of cattle that will meet the CAB carcass specifications. E-mail [info@cabprogram.com](mailto:info@cabprogram.com) or call 1-877-241-0717 for a list of those feedyards.

**Q** Can a cow-calf producer participate in CAB without having the feedlot or packer data on slaughtered cattle?

**A** If you are not interested in feeding the cattle you produce, look for ways to track their performance after the sale just the same — if you want to have a place in the increasingly end-product-value-based future.

Call your Extension agent about feed-out opportunities in which you can test a subset of your calves to gain insight into your herd's feedlot performance and carcass value so you can see where you are. Then you can try to improve. Use the in-

formation from the steer tests to convince buyers of the feeding and carcass value of your calves.

In general, you can aim for achieving a higher level of CAB certification in your calves by including positive expected progeny differences (EPDs) for marbling and retail product in the selection criteria for bulls. Don't back away from your other goals — just add carcass traits. Studies show you don't have to give up anything in herd performance to enhance marbling, and lack of marbling is the main reason carcasses don't qualify for CAB. There have been big increases in CAB acceptance when producers mated heifers sired by positive-marbling bulls to other positive-marbling bulls.

Genetics come first, but recordkeeping is a must. Establish your benchmarks on

the percentage of cattle from your herd that can qualify for CAB today (the national average for Angus-type cattle is 18.4%, but some Angus-type herds qualify as many as 80%). Bring that information back to the individual cows and bulls, and include it in future selection and culling decisions.

**Q** I use registered Angus bulls, so why don't I receive a CAB premium for my calves?

**A** You do, as shown by research from universities and Cattle-Fax, as well as the CAB-funded auction-market study "Here's the Premium." The demand for CAB brand products translates into fed-cattle premiums of \$2-\$5/cwt. of carcass,

and that same per-hundredweight premium is typically passed to live Angus calves, compared to non-Angus, at auction.

That's a big premium, considering how little is known about the potential of most Angus-type calves to achieve CAB carcass certification at harvest. With more documentation and genetic progress toward the CAB goal, your premiums should increase.

For more information, call Steve Suther, director of industry information, at 1-877-241-0717; e-mail [ssuther@certifiedangusbeef.com](mailto:ssuther@certifiedangusbeef.com); or call the CAB Supply Development office, (785) 539-0123.

