

# Connecting With Consumers

## CAB brand creates demand and adds value to the entire beef supply chain.

by *Kylee Kohls Sellnow, Certified Angus Beef*

To receive higher premiums on your cattle, there has to be strong demand at the meatcase — not just any demand, but demand for high-quality beef. As a younger generation of consumers gains more buying power in the market, expectations of quality are expanding.

“Our product has to taste great every time, and the consumer has to

feel good about what the brand stands for,” says Nicole Erceg, Certified Angus Beef (CAB) communications director. “They seek products they think are good for them, the animal and the planet.”

That’s why CAB is committed to adding value throughout the entire beef supply chain. Using three core pillars to connect with consumers, CAB:

- ▶ shares stories and messaging,
- ▶ provides options, and
- ▶ creates experiences that bridge back to cattle care, the environment and people.



**Pillar 1:**

### **Messaging that resonates**

When asked about sustainability, animal welfare is the No. 1



Starting this year, you may see labels touting *Dedicated to Humane Animal Care and Climate-Friendly Practices* on CAB brand products. It's an effort to resonate with consumers who want to feel good about the beef they buy.

consumer concern, followed by the environment, says Erceg, sharing consumer research.

“The way we reach most consumers is at the meatcase,” she says. “So as we think about telling your story, it has to be simple and fit on a package.”

Starting in 2023, retail beef buyers may see the statement *Dedicated to Humane Animal Care and Climate-Friendly Practices* on packaging and marketing of the brand.

“We landed on this statement through consumer research,” Erceg explains. “It’s not something that connects with cattlemen; those aren’t words we’d use to describe cattle production. But, it is what cattle

producers are doing, and it resonates with consumers.”

Supporting the statement requires more information on production practices to verify how producers care for cattle and manage the land.

Quantifying practices at the ranch is challenging, but accredited certifications — like Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) — verify producers’ dedication to animal welfare to consumers. That’s why CAB is asking Angus breeders and commercial cattlemen to share their BQA or equivalent certification with the brand.

“It’s doing things like BQA certification, keeping good production records and having a grazing management plan,” Erceg says, speaking about increasing consumers’ trust. “As a food marketer, I can take that information and use it to garner more value for your product.”

If you’re BQA-certified and would like to share your certificate with CAB, visit <https://cutthebull.info/>.

Taking care of the land provides sustainable resources for cattlemen to raise premium beef year after year. The Working Grasslands Conservation Initiative supports the “climate-friendly” part of the marketing claim by creating a collaboration to measure environmental practices with Ducks Unlimited.

“We are experts of beef,” says Kirsten Nickles, CAB animal care and sustainability scientist, “and Ducks Unlimited has conservation experts and access to research that quantifies how cattle and grasslands are essential to a healthy ecosystem.”

The initiative supports voluntary programs for producers in the Northern Great Plains and collects data measuring carbon sequestration, soil health improvements, clean water resource development and biodiversity.

“Consumers trust producers and believe beef can be raised in a way that’s good for the environment,” Nickles says. “This allows us to gather actual metrics in a variety of environments and share it through the supply chain.”

While data is still being collected, initial findings will be released later this year.



## Pillar 2:

### Providing options

To stay relevant in an evolving marketplace, and support Angus ranchers in a new way, the brand introduced the CAB Ranch to Table program. Beginning with a pilot program, the soft launch occurred in fall 2022 with an expected full launch in summer 2023. Ranch to Table allows cattlemen to

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market beef that qualifies for the brand under the CAB brand logo, direct to consumer through things like a local meat shop or freezer-beef sales.

“For years, CAB has aimed to narrow the gap between the family farms and ranches and consumers, and today they are interested in knowing more about where their beef comes from,” says John Stika, CAB president. “One of the things that we determined can help narrow that gap is this Ranch to Table program.”

Not only does this serve consumers, but it also serves registered Angus cattlemen and women looking to directly create pull-through demand for the cattle they raise, Stika says.

To qualify for the program, producers must:

- ▶ be American Angus Association members;
- ▶ present proof of Angus bull registrations;
- ▶ submit current BQA (or equivalent) certificate; and
- ▶ provide standard procedures from their processor.

To learn more about the program, visit <https://cabcattle.com/Ranch-To-Table/>.



### Pillar 3:

### Experiences that connect

A chef and a rancher have more in common than one would assume: long hours, sometimes-grueling environments and a rewarding day's work.

Five young Angus ranchers gathered alongside five Johnson & Wales culinary students for the inaugural CAB “Connecting the

Culinarian and Rancher” event, where they had the chance to learn from each other, and then break bread together.

“We saw this as an opportunity to bring the young generation of ranchers and the young generation of culinarians together in one space to

have conversations about the who, why, what, and ‘How can we do this better?’ of both raising cattle and serving beef in a restaurant,” says Ashley Breneman, CAB executive chef. “This also gave these students the chance to establish lifelong relationships at

opposite ends of the beef supply chain.”

The day started with introductions and backgrounds of where each of the students got their start and what they are studying in college. With majors ranging from sustainable food systems to livestock genetics, these 10 students brought unique perspectives to the table from around the country.

The students spent the morning at Chippewa Valley Angus Farm, where the young ranchers each discussed

topics related to raising cattle.

Animal nutrition, Angus breed characteristics and genetic selections, animal care and handling, sustainability and live-cattle marketing gave insight to the culinary students about what it takes to produce a high-quality steak.

“Even though we come from different backgrounds and totally different ends of the country, we all end up having the same end goal,” says Mia Encinias, West Texas A&M animal science student. “As ranchers, our goal is to create the best product possible; but the chefs’ is to serve it. Without one another, we wouldn’t be able to do what we do.”

Chef-rancher teams joined forces at the CAB Culinary Center to cook the perfect steak.

“I was paired up with a young rancher and we cooked our steaks together,” says Aroua Hammond, culinary student. “I utilized techniques that I’ve learned in culinary school, and it was really cool because at the ranch, I didn’t really know anything. Behind the grill and countertop, they didn’t really know anything. The script was flipped.”

After learning how great steaks get their start, Hammond shared that her goal of keeping guests coming back to



Providing cattlemen another way to add value to their business, CAB Ranch to Table launched in 2023 to give consumers a direct connection with where their beef comes from.



Culinary student Aidan Kincaid (left) provides tips as rancher Colter Pohlman checks the temperature of his steak.

her restaurant is a lifelong achievement — similar to ranching.

“I think that there are a lot of similarities between us, and the shared passion and love for the product has been really cool to experience,” Hammond says.

Leaving the event with new friends and fresh perspectives, the students took their experiences back to their campuses and family ranches with nimble hands, open minds, big ideas and a newfound responsibility to consider the opposite end of the supply chain when making business decisions down the road.

More importantly, these students learned they will always have a seat at each other’s tables, no matter where life takes them.

## Creating demand for the future

The best beef used to be a great-

tasting, consistent steak — and that’s still important — but now we have to deliver more on that product, Erceg says.

While we must meet consumer preferences, it’s driven by the supply chain delivering beef to consumers at grocery stores and restaurants and their sustainability commitments.

Whether you’re marketing Angus bulls or commercial feeder cattle, the more information you can collect on an animal, the wider your customer base is, she explains.

“That’s really what we’re trying to

At the inaugural CAB “Connecting the Culinarian and Rancher” event, culinary students had a chance to see ranching firsthand at the Chippewa Valley Angus Farm.



do at the brand — look for ways to add value along the chain,” Erceg adds. “And producers are at the very beginning and have the most information to share about that calf.” **ABB**

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Editor’s note: Kylee Kohls Sellnow is CAB brand communications manager.