



Your Link to

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Mythbusters

From the coffee shop to the farm store, people debate the economics and practicality of feeding for a value-based grid. Most Angus producers know by now that Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) never owns cattle or beef, but there's a lot of other confusion out there. You've heard, maybe even said some of these lines: "Once the hide comes off, all beef's the same." "It doesn't pay enough to pay attention to quality." "You have to sacrifice gain for grade."

If you've ever seen the popular Discovery Channel TV show *MythBusters*, you're prepared for what follows. No need to take cover or put on your safety glasses. These aren't quick, homemade experiments laden with fire and danger — just tried and true research to blow the top off some long-held industry myths about high-quality beef production:

Myth: *If I select for high-quality cattle, I'll ruin my cow herd.*

Fact: Selection for marbling has no negative effect on cow herd function. A Kansas State University (K-State) research review shows there is a slightly positive correlation between marbling and preweaning gain from milk. It also says you can select for marbling and heifer pregnancy, because there's no correlation between the two.

More positive news from the same literature review says backfat and marbling are not related in Angus populations.

"That implies a breeder can match both marbling and 'doability' to a particular management system," says the study's author, Twig Marston.

Myth: *Cattle are cattle. There's really not much difference from one herd to the next.*

Fact: All cattle are not created equal. An eight-year study of more than 25,000 head revealed a \$459-per-head difference, on average, between the top and bottom cattle in any given pen. Average daily gain (ADG) varied by 2.82 pounds (lb.) per day, but more than half of the value difference was due to carcass quality.

All Angus are not equal, either. The American Angus Association's dollar value (\$Value) selection index for beef value (\$B) combines postweaning performance and carcass traits. Comparing the progeny of bulls in the top and bottom 10% for \$B shows a wide variation. Bulls in the top 10% produced triple the number of Prime and Choice carcasses as the bulls in the bottom tenth. Selection from the upper tier did not impede maternal traits, yet delivered a 42-lb. carcass weight advantage.

Righting the most common fallacies of high-quality beef production.

Myth: *All the grade in cattle is made the last 100 days on feed, so nothing I do on the ranch makes a difference.*

Fact: Actually, scientists have discovered marbling starts much earlier in a calf's life, perhaps even before a calf is born, when ranch management makes all the difference. Health, weaning, nutrition and implanting strategies also affect the subsequent grade. The weeks before and after weaning seem to be the most critical period for marbling development. The *Best Practices Manual*, a cow-calf producer guide from CAB, details common ranch practices shown to improve carcass quality.

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Myth: *High-quality cattle are not suitable for my region.*

Fact: The key is finding and adapting the right genetics to your situation, whether that's cold winters; fescue problems; or hot, dry summers. With the diversity and strength of the Angus breed, you can adapt a herd known for high-quality to any location in the country.

For example, a western Kansas producer grazes cattle on short-grass range with few added inputs. Often faced with drought, he still averaged 79% *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), including CAB Prime, on 500 head during three years.

A rancher just off the Mexican border faces 30-40 days per year with temperatures above 100° F, but he keeps the herd straightbred Angus because of the predictability in adapting the cows. Taking the environment in stride, calves consistently hit 90%-100% Choice with 40%-50% CAB.

Four Missouri brothers fight fescue toxicity by purchasing locally adapted bulls and keeping replacements. Working quality into their production goals, they consistently reach 80%-90% Choice, and the percentage is climbing.

A South Dakota winter isn't easy on cattle, but that's where one purebred Angus breeder buys his customers' calves back to place on feed. The cattle excel in uniformity and can exceed 50% CAB and CAB Prime.

"Rough country" has different meanings across the U.S., but from all four corners and places in between, cattlemen are proving high-quality Angus can be more than suitable.

Myth: *Premiums are not high enough to justify aiming for the CAB brand.*

Fact: CAB adds value throughout the production chain. Historically, steer calves of known Angus genetics consistently earn premiums averaging \$4.87 per hundredweight (cwt.) at the sale barn. The CAB "Here's the Premium" project has tracked auctions across the U.S. for 10 years. Fall 2008 numbers showed a record premium of \$6.79 per cwt. for 509-lb. steers vs. their non-Angus counterparts.

Feeders and those retaining ownership of calves through finishing see the most direct benefit. Since the market began paying premiums 20 years ago, packers have paid producers more than \$250 million for hitting the CAB target. That's just for the CAB

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component of grid sales; if you include the greater Choice and Prime premiums associated with aiming for quality, plus higher cash bids, you can multiply that figure several times.

Most of those premiums have come in the past decade. The \$27.8 million in CAB premiums paid in 2007 can be seen

as \$10,700 per day, \$1,338 per hour or about \$22.25 per operating minute that CAB-licensed packers pay for cattle hitting the CAB target.

Myth: *Cattle that qualify for CAB lack growth potential.*

Fact: Proving growth and quality are

not antagonistic, Iowa State University data from 2002 to 2004 show CAB cattle that were more than 75% Angus actually outgained (3.29-lb. ADG) those with less than a quarter Angus breeding (3.05-lb. ADG).

A CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) study found groups that achieved more

than 30% CAB had a slightly higher ADG than those with 10% or less CAB acceptance, 3.33 lb. vs. 3.28 lb.

Myth: *If I want my cattle to grade well I have to sacrifice the performance advantages of implants.*

Fact: Cattle raised without implants do typically grade better, but research at South Dakota State University proves carefully planned implanting can add pounds without compromising grade. Delaying rather than avoiding an implant resulted in 15% more cattle reaching premium Choice compared to cattle implanted at placement. Those implants also increased ADG and feed efficiency by 5.5%, as opposed to non-implanted calves.

Myth: *I can't afford to hit the CAB target because the cattle have to be fed longer and to a fatter end point.*

Fact: You don't have to break the bank by keeping the cattle in the yard longer, laying down extra fat to reach high-quality end points. Proper genetic selection and management are keys, but remember, marbling is not correlated to external fat in Angus cattle. According to Iowa Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) records, cattle that achieved CAB acceptance had a shorter feeding period compared to non-black cattle (169.6 days vs. 179.4). CAB cattle had external fat cover similar to black-hided cattle that didn't qualify, 0.498 inches (in.) vs. 0.445, respectively.

Data on 12,000 head fed through CAB feedlots support that. Groups with less than 10% CAB acceptance hung around 0.51 in. backfat, not significantly different from that in groups where more than 30% hit the CAB target. What's more, those with the highest CAB level had a lower cost of gain, \$47.56 per cwt. compared to \$50.65 for the lower-grading groups.

Myth: *I can't aim for CAB because I don't want to sacrifice carcass weight.*

Fact: Qualifying cattle have about the same carcass weights as the national average. CAB's fiscal year 2007-2008 summary illustrates a 6-lb. advantage rather than a sacrifice, with an 815-lb. hot carcass weight for brand qualifiers compared to the average of 809 lb.

Myth: *CAB marketing is impressive, but it's all just hype — the consumer really doesn't know the difference.*

Fact: Research from Oklahoma State University shows there's a 1-in-6 chance of a bad eating experience with a USDA Select strip steak. USDA Choice moves that number to 1-in-13, but when consumers choose the CAB brand they can count on a consistently tender and juicy product 96% of the time. CAB has been successful for 30 years because the product performs. The business world is full of examples where great marketing was applied to

inferior products, and the results are always the same: failure.

Myth: *I have to be a big producer to “sign up” and participate in CAB premiums.*

Fact: CAB has created a market force for quality that all Angus producers should cash in on — no special membership required. CAB was founded in 1978 to increase demand for Angus cattle by creating pull-through demand for consistently high-quality branded beef. Through market price signals, CAB creates premiums for fed cattle, feeder cattle and all Angus cattle with predictable and documented genetics.

Any producer of any size can aim for quality and reap rewards. Some feedlots have special programs for smaller producers or offer a variety of pen sizes. Many state universities have small-scale value-discovery programs that accept as few as five head, so anyone can learn how their cattle will feed and perform on a grid. Scores of small producers have banded together to feed and earn CAB premiums.

Myth: *Since cattle don’t have to be purebred Angus to make CAB, it must be just a black-hided program.*

Fact: When the American Angus Association created the brand it still owns, Board members kept it grounded in the real world, where most purebred cattle are created primarily for breeding rather than the feedlot. The black hide is only a first indicator. Today, CAB acceptance starts with cattle being identified as either 51% black-hided or AngusSource®-tagged. Nearly 60% of the fed cattle in the U.S. meet these criteria.

Then a set of 10 scientific carcass specifications further create uniformity in product, from marbling amount and texture to such breed characteristics as neck hump height and beef muscling type. These weed out non-Angus cattle and ensure consistency. Carcass specifications back up the brand’s promise to consumers. On average, fewer than one out of five black-hided cattle are good enough to carry the CAB brand.

Myth: *All the Angus beef I see at fast-food restaurants is CAB.*

Fact: Not even close, unfortunately. The original branded beef program is also one of the most copied. Today there are 67 certified branded beef programs and 48 of them are Angus, but don’t be fooled as some non-producer consumers may be. The specifications are not the same. Some even allow Select, Standard and cow beef for their label, so whether you’re at a quick-serve restaurant or in your local grocery store, to make sure of the quality make sure it says *Certified Angus Beef*® with the ©.

For more information on any one of these myths, visit www.cabpartners.com or contact Miranda at mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.



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