



Your Link to

by **CLINT WALENCIAK**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*



Consistent vigilance

Last year was the 35th anniversary of a brand you created to add value to your registered-Angus cattle through its specification-based, high-quality beef. Success has come in part by staying on top of “*The science behind the sizzle*,” to note a trademarked phrase.

For historical background, let’s look at another one: “*They’re worth more if*

they’re black,” according to a slogan the American Angus Association registered in 1962. As waves of Continental cattle entered the United States and then the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand began its mission, the old slogan caught fire.

The 1990s brought double-digit growth for CAB, but it was also a time when that slogan led to rapid growth in the share of black-hided cattle. Perhaps the Angus influence was not as high in some of those cattle as we had in the past, and as we have again today. Certainly, it was a transitional time between well-established lines of higher-marbling Angus and those selected for more growth.

Major effects were delayed into the next decade in the turning of generations. After peaking in 1999 at 20%, CAB acceptance rates saw a seven-year decline to 14% in 2006 as all cattle grew heavier and fatter.

We had our theories, but this is a brand based on science from Day 1. We routinely capture and analyze oceans of data, so it made sense to bring that strategy to bear along with the great relationships we share with packing partners. After all, you can’t manage what you can’t measure.

Analyzing the data

Starting in late 2004 with analysis in 2005, we went beyond routine data to discover how our carcass specifications interact with the supply of cattle coming into the licensed plants.

This first Consist (“makeup” or “composition”) Study would establish the baseline of where we were, identify the carcass characteristics that needed the most attention and those positioned for the greatest improvement.

In more detail, it aimed to (1) quantify the influence of each CAB carcass specification on ultimate acceptance rates of designated Angus-type or A-stamped cattle, and (2) profile the entire A-stamped population, including those that did not qualify for CAB. The study would be limited to the main four traits of ribeye area, fat thickness, marbling and hot carcass weight, and their distribution within each of those populations.

Results let us see just how far off the mark those that didn’t qualify were. It was the first time we could develop a 360-degree understanding of the Angus-based commercial-cattle population, and it led to two main outcomes.

First, our Industry Information and Supply Development teams were able to develop messaging that would help

cattle producers profitably target the brand, increase CAB acceptance rates and ultimately increase product supply.

Second was an unexpected opportunity. The new insights led to discussions with our packers, processors and end users, who saw a chance to evolve CAB carcass specification from eight to the current 10-spec program implemented in 2007. It removed the requirement for a USDA Yield Grade 3.9 or leaner and replaced it with the three component specifications for minimum and maximum ribeye area [10 square inches (sq. in.) to 16 sq. in.], fat thickness <1.0 in. and hot carcass weight <1,000 pounds (lb.).

Setting independent requirements for each of those traits placed even greater emphasis on product consistency to end users, compared to yield grade alone.

Other than that “evolution,” probably the single greatest takeaway was discovering that 85% of the A-stamped cattle that did not qualify for the brand had insufficient marbling. That may have been linked with another deficiency, such as carcass maturity or yield grade, but marbling had by far the greatest impact.

Eight years later

Since our original Consist research in 2005, the CAB Supply Team has

focused much attention on the known importance of marbling and the role of genetics, health and management in “Targeting the Brand,” including its *Best Practices Manual* for cow-calf and stocker operators.

However, just as those manuals are updated over time, we knew data from eight years ago would only get more dated. So, with the same ideas that launched the 2005 study, CAB conducted its most recent Consist Study in early 2013.

So how have we done during the past eight years? CAB Meat Scientist Phil Bass helped point this out.

Figs. 1 and 2 show how carcasses were distributed across the different marbling classifications for all A-stamped cattle, as well as the CAB qualifiers. Overall, we found a positive shift to the right for both populations. The average marbling score for the total A-stamped population increased by 7 units, or degrees of marbling, and an even greater increase was found in the CAB-accepted population, up 11 degrees of marbling.

Those may seem like small achievements, but consider their impact on CAB acceptance rate.

In fiscal year 2013, producers achieved a record annual 24.20% CAB acceptance. If you take away that

CAB STAFF CONTACTS

206 Riffel Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-8588;
phone: 330-345-2333; fax: 330-345-0808
www.cabpartners.com

John Stika, president
Brent Eichar, senior vice president
Tracey Erickson, vice president, marketing
Mark Polzer, vice president, business development
Larry Corah, vice president, supply development
Mark McCully, vice president, production

SUPPLY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Kansas staff:
CAB Program Satellite Office
1107 Hylton Heights Rd.,
Manhattan, KS 66502
785-539-0123; fax: 785-539-2883
Larry Corah, vice president
Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist
Wendy Nichols, office and data manager

Kara Lee, supply programs manager
30731 172nd St., Leavenworth, KS 66048
812-653-0020

Nebraska staff:

Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist
782 5th St., PO Box 856,
Chappell, NE 69129
308-874-2203

Miranda Reiman, assistant director, industry information
75845 Rd. 417, Cozad, NE 69130;
308-784-2294

Ohio staff:

Marilyn Conley, administrative assistant

INDUSTRY INFORMATION DIVISION

Steve Suther, director
16360 Victory Rd., Onaga, KS 66521
785-889-4162

Blogs:

Consumer-oriented: www.GoRare.com
Supply Development:
<http://blackinkwithCAB.com>

Twitter:

@BlackInkBasics
@CertAngusBeef

Find us on Facebook:

• [BlackInkBasics](#)
• [CertifiedAngusBeef](#)

To order CAB merchandise, visit <http://pos.certifiedangusbeef.com>. For a source for recipe ideas, storage and handling tips, restaurant listings, retail store locations and cooking information, visit www.certifiedangusbeef.com.

Fig. 1: Marbling score (MS) distribution of A-stamped cattle at licensed packing plants

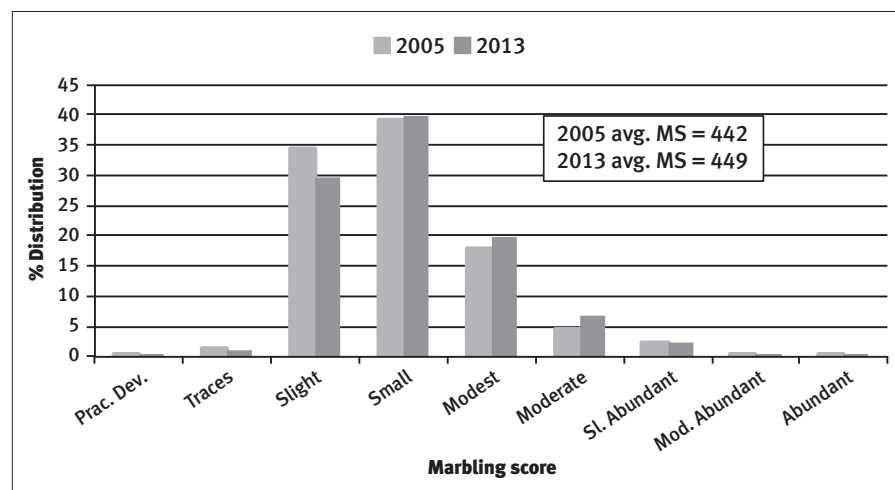


Fig. 2: Marbling score (MS) distribution of CAB®-certified cattle at licensed packing plants

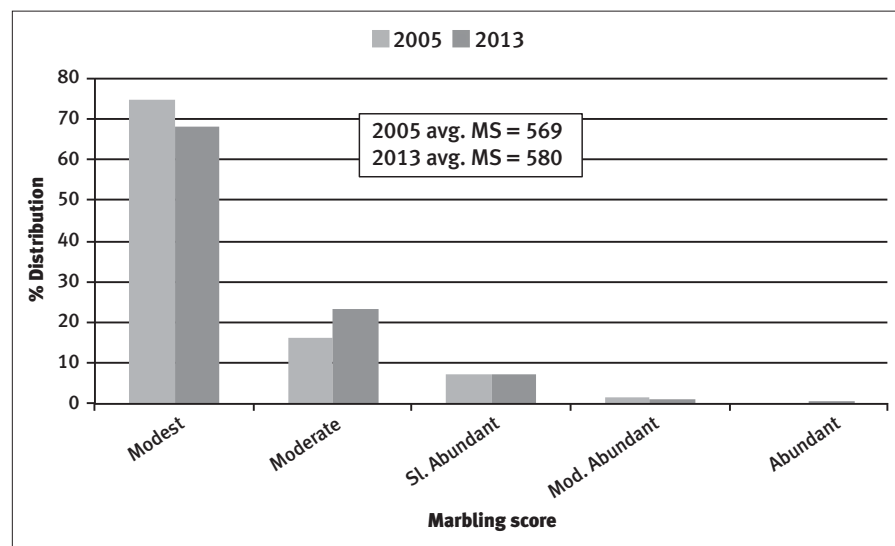
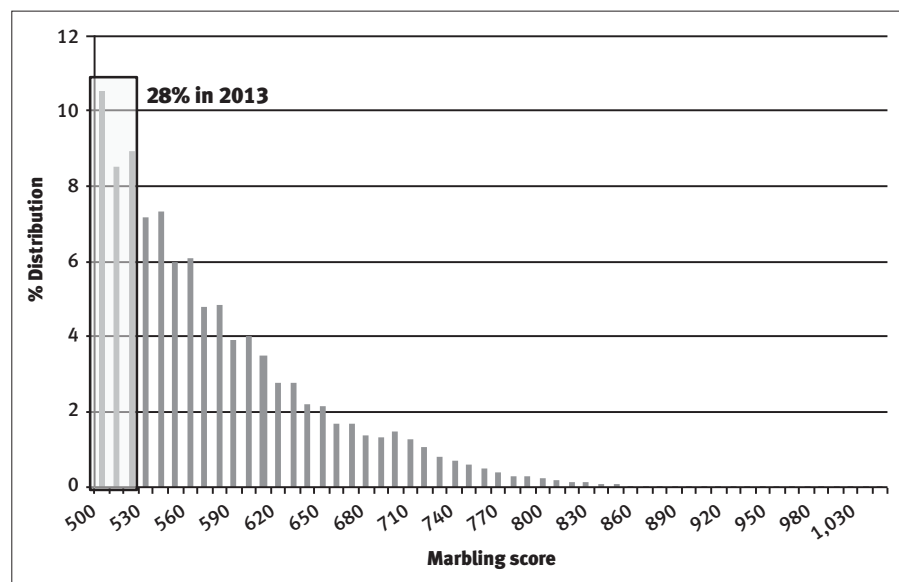


Fig. 3: Marbling score distribution of CAB®-certified cattle at licensed packing plants, 2013



7-degree improvement, the 2013 acceptance rate would have been 22.04%, translating into roughly 300,000 fewer carcasses certified. Take that one step further and it would have potentially negated the 6.7% or 54 million lb. of growth licensed packers, retailers and distributors achieved in 2013.

When looking at those cattle that did qualify for the program, another important aspect is by how much they cleared the hurdle. Fig. 3 illustrates the distribution of marbling scores within the population of certified cattle, and it shows more than a quarter (28%) of certified carcasses fell within 30 degrees of the minimum requirement of Modest⁰⁰.

That was an improvement over the 33% seen in 2005, but it still magnifies the point of how delicate these accomplishments are. The 11-degree improvement in marbling is good news, but the grouping near the borderline underscores our need for ranchers and feeders to stay diligent in keeping a focus on marbling.

Aside from the obviously critical role of marbling in determining CAB supply, we also need to take a look at the second-most-impactful specification to CAB acceptance rates, ribeye area.

There was no individual ribeye

requirement for the 2005 data, but Fig. 4 shows us the change in distribution of ribeye area (REA) across all A-stamped cattle. Given the increase in hot carcass weights over the period, it's no surprise REA has increased from an average of 13.2 sq. in. in 2005 to 13.8 sq. in. in 2013.

Similar to the changes in marbling, 0.6 sq. in. doesn't seem like much, but it means about 12% of cattle that didn't qualify for the brand had an issue with ribeye size. Also no surprise is the fact that most — the 9.5% portion of the 12% total — comes from REA being too large, and the remaining 2.5% were too small.

There's still plenty of work ahead in terms of genetic focus and management coordination, but marbling gains have already led to two positive outcomes. We have increased supplies for the brand in a time of shrinking fed-cattle supplies, and we have increased eating satisfaction for consumers.

Moving forward, we will need to keep simultaneous pressure on hitting the sweet spot with secondary specifications like REA that prevent cattle from qualifying and diminish eating satisfaction for consumers.



Editor's Note: *Clint Walenciak is director of packing for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

Fig. 4: REA distribution of A-stamped cattle at licensed packing plants

