“Don’t expect too much”

By Gary D. Fike, Beef Cattle Specialist, Certified Angus Beef LLC

You can call it negativity, or you might term it realism in light of how so much of the world works.

It was a lesson my mother taught me early on: “Don’t expect too much, or you might just be disappointed.” The flip side of that was, you might actually get surprised in a good way, if things turn out great. Better to think you’re getting a sack of leftover Halloween candy for Christmas, but instead you get a new shotgun!

Keeping expectations down is for “white elephant” gift exchanges and those who buy variable commodities like beef and cattle. When you have a brand, you make promises to aim higher than average. You try your best not to disappoint anyone.

I know that when a consumer decides to go out to eat at a nice restaurant and orders a $50 (or more; remember I live in Kansas and $50 is a lot of money) steak dinner, he or she is expecting a lot. And I’m not talking about expectations for the baked potato, the salad or the vegetable—nor even the “home-made dinner roll” (do they really make them at home and then bring them into the restaurant?). The item that is judged most keenly is in the center of the plate: the ribeye, strip or tenderloin steak.

It had better be hot, juicy, tender and full of flavor. And it had better be that way every time, at that price. A customer probably won’t complain or care too much about a limp salad leaf, an underripe cherry tomato, a mushy black olive or a twice-baked potato that was actually only baked once. But they will complain if the steak underperforms.

Successful restaurant owners know all that, which is why foodservice sales of the Certified Angus Beef® brand reached a record 302 million pounds at a record 9,000 licensed restaurants around the world last year. A third of them brand those CAB items on their menus, while others rely on dependable CAB quality to build the positive link to their restaurant brand name. They want to be known as a place where it’s OK to expect a lot.
What about the world of buying and selling Angus cattle? Buying a bull these days, do you think expectations are low? I mean, what do you expect for $4,000? That lower end today is twice what your customers were paying for the affordable end just a few years ago. And certainly at $10,000, it better perform.

You’re in the seedstock business, trying to build relationships with repeat buyers. You have a brand that stands for something and you try your best not to disappoint.

Buying a commercial Angus steer calf is not to be taken lightly either, when a six-weight commands $1,750 or more. Buyers keep track of performance, so like it or not, the commercial ranch is building a brand, too.

There are still a lot of places where Mom’s lesson fits today. But dedicated Angus cattlemen and women set out more than 36 years ago to make sure there are some exceptions to cynical realism. They carved out at least one great thing to depend on, and as owners you stand by it today because it makes it ever more worthwhile to aim high for you and your customers.

It’s a market-driven system in which satisfied consumers demand more of the best, even at $50 or more per meal, and that drives the supply for more of the same. Which means more premiums for Angus cattle that can qualify, which feeds back to registered seedstock producers making more balanced-trait Angus bulls for the commercial cow man – who raises those calves right and gets them to the feedlot, where they are managed and fed for that ultimate quality endpoint. It truly is a self-perpetuating supply chain because everybody gets what they want.

If you’re buying cattle or beef outside of that loop, better keep that advice in mind: “Let’s hope it’s good, but don’t expect too much.” Love you, Mom!

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