

## Introduction

If you want to make money on your cowherd in today's marketplace, you must understand such economically relevant traits as reproductive efficiency and growth rate. But you can't stop there. Too often, producers across the U.S. fail to understand what our ultimate customers are looking for. Consumers are the demand drivers of the beef industry.

Consumers communicate with dollars—the only new dollars that all beef industry segments have to share. They have spoken clearly in restaurants, grocery stores and research panels. That's how we know the No. 1 reason they lay their dollar down for beef is taste, primarily determined by marbling. The marketplace has reflected this tremendous demand for USDA Prime and premium Choice (Modest or higher Marbling Score).

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand was established in 1978 to consistently identify a product to meet this demand, though demand was not so well documented in those days. Since that beginning, the CAB brand has grown to the largest and most recognized brand of fresh beef in the world. That did not happen because of clever marketing, but because the CAB brand delivers on a promise to consumers.

With all major packing companies in the U.S. and Canada producing the CAB brand, it has become synonymous for “high quality.” Nearly every fed-cattle marketing grid features a CAB premium. Recognizing that, cattle feeders selling on those grids seek cattle that can bolster their profits by producing carcasses packers demand.



Slightly Abundant



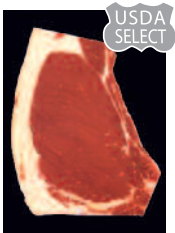
Moderate



Modest



Small



Slight

## Brand Specifications

To qualify for the CAB brand, cattle must meet the following criteria, after first being sold to a CAB-licensed packing plant. For a list of those plants, visit [www.CABpartners.com](http://www.CABpartners.com). Selection for the brand is a two-step process:

**Step 1 – Live animal specification –** must be “Angus-influenced”

- Predominantly (51% or greater) solid black hair coat OR
- Genotypic: AngusSource® program enrollment. Visit [www.angussource.com](http://www.angussource.com) for more information.

**Step 2 – Carcass specifications**

1. Modest or higher marbling
2. Medium or fine marbling texture
3. “A” maturity for each, lean and skeletal characteristics
4. 10- to 16-square-inch ribeye area
5. Less than 1,000-pound hot carcass weight
6. Less than 1-inch fat thickness
7. Superior muscling (restricts dairy influence)
8. Practically free of capillary rupture
9. No dark cutters
10. No neck hump exceeding 2 inches

While all of these criteria are important for delivering on the CAB brand promise, one specification stands out. More than 90% of all Angus-influenced cattle that fail to qualify for the brand lack sufficient marbling. Therefore, cow-calf producers aiming for the CAB target need to make marbling a high priority in breeding and management.

Insufficient marbling in the cattle we produce is a problem across the entire beef industry. According to the 2005 National Beef Quality Audit, this deficiency costs the industry more than \$28 per head, on average. When selling on a value-based grid, the difference in value between a USDA Select and a CAB-qualifying carcass can exceed \$160.

**The 2005 audit also identified the ideal quality grade mix, far from where we are today:**

	Ideal	Actual
USDA Prime	7%	3%
Top Choice	29%	23%
Low Choice	33%	37%
Select	31%	31%
Standard & lower	0%	6%

Research has shown that the level of marbling in beef is determined by a combination of genetics and management. Carcass quality starts early in the animal's life, perhaps even before birth. In these early stages, the number of marbling cells that can exist is largely determined. As the animal develops, those marbling cells are filled, and at a greater rate when finished on a high-concentrate diet. This combination of cell number and size determines the final marbling score of the harvested carcass.

Cattle can achieve only the carcass merit that their genetics allow. That means genetic selection is critical. No amount of good management can overcome poor genetics, but outstanding genetics can easily be minimized through poor management. This manual can be a road map for cow-calf producers to effectively combine genetics and management to produce cattle that hit a high-quality target. It does not attempt to address every component or decision in your cattle operation—only those that have been shown to directly and significantly affect end-product quality, especially marbling.

Producing for the CAB brand is a total system approach, but don't be discouraged if your operation falls short in one or two areas. Each chapter and recommendation is intended to improve your aim as you strive to produce high-quality beef. If all practices cannot be implemented at one time, start with the genetics of your herd bulls and a few key management factors, adjusting other practices as you can over time.

Beyond production of value-added cattle, this manual will discuss and recommend marketing strategies to capture added value. A value-added product sold as a commodity will bring a commodity price. That's why it is critical to evaluate your marketing methods to maximize returns on your more focused beef cattle investment.

## **The goal of this manual is doubling the average CAB acceptance rate.**

The national average is 15% for all Angus-influenced cattle evaluated. If your cattle are average now, they could move up to 30% acceptance if you follow these guidelines. If they already achieve 30% acceptance but you are considering a more focused effort, these ideas can help you move the herd's quality to a new level. Many producers have shown that 50% to 60% CAB acceptance can be part of annual planning. It begins with these simple steps:

- **General Management**
- **Genetic Selection**
- **Health**
- **Nutrition**
- **Marketing**