



CAB Corner on Quality (graphic file logo for heading available on request)

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Searching for a bigger piece of the pie

By Jody Wacker, Quality Assurance Manager, Value-Added Products

Cattle producers always look for ways to make the core business more profitable. Whether you add an enterprise, start up a sideline business or just tighten things up to gain overall efficiency, you're looking for a bigger piece of the profit pie. At Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), we look for ways to help serve it up.

The core business for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand will always be fresh meat – those mouthwatering steaks we have all grown to love. But there's always another slice of pie out there, just waiting to be discovered.

The beef industry is finally catching up with poultry in variety of products. If you watched ABC's *Good Morning America* or read the *New York Times* in September, you may have learned about the newest hit, "Cheeseburger Fries." Based on America's love for the hamburger, these appetizers made from ground beef, cheese and breading drew a lot of media attention as an innovative new beef product.

Advance Food Company in Enid, Okla., developed Cheeseburger Fries in partnership with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) "R&D Ranch," in response to the growing popularity of protein-based appetizers. Advance offers a CAB brand version of the appetizer in two flavors (regular cheeseburger and Jalapeño), which can be served alone as an ingredient in entrées, salads, and sandwiches.

Many other new and innovative CAB products hit the market this year, including four flavors of marinated sirloin. This launched CAB into the marinated fresh meat arena where Hormel pork tenderloins have reigned for so long. Although 42% of CAB value-added product sales are the tried and true deli meats, innovative products like these are important to maintaining growth and momentum in the category of convenience beef items.

The brand holds a diverse portfolio of convenience items – as diverse as our licensed partners. There is a CAB brand convenience item to fit every restaurant concept, and one for every section of the menu – lunch, dinner and the kid’s menu. Products range from such staples as deli meats and Heat-and-Serve entrees to more unique and innovative products like fully cooked prime rib, “Breakaway” Philly steak, and the touted Cheeseburger Fries.

The CAB Value-added Products Division is the fastest growing department in the company for sales, and added staff will allow the brand to expand into new categories of convenience items.

All of this requires expertise. Mark Gwin, Research and Development Specialist, has joined the division’s team to bring forward new products, and identify avenues for existing products to improve upon the brand's premium image.

“The top priority is for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand’s convenience and deli meats to remain the highest quality products in all major categories,” he says. “We want our value-added items to become destination products just like our fresh beef.”

What does all this mean to the producer? New processing technologies make useful cuts out of some muscles that would otherwise be destined for ground beef. This doesn’t mean adding a bunch of fillers and artificial ingredients to mask quality problems, but rather knowing the muscle attributes and handling each muscle properly to make it perform.

Over the past several years, approximately 270 lb. of meat per qualifying carcass has sold from the packer as CAB brand product. Innovative new beef items help use more of each branded carcass by utilizing “new” cuts. This allows the packer to return more profits from qualifying cattle to the producer.

It is important to your future that we keep adding to the product diversity with those new slices of pie, while continuing to increase volume of existing successful products. Since the division came into being in 1994, pounds sold as CAB value-added products have increased rapidly. Volume for fiscal 2003 stood at 12.75 million lb., up 19.7% from 2002. Throughout the last decade and in the years ahead, our goal will remain: Provide the highest quality convenience items on the market under the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand.

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