



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

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We take care of our own

By Amanda Barstow, CAB Brand Assurance Director

It takes a dynamic support system to keep the world's number one branded beef program going strong and adding value to your Angus cattle. Can you name the single most crucial element of the *Certified Angus Beef®* (CAB®) brand? Some would argue it is our feedlot licensing program, our marketing efforts or the fact that we work with more than 80% of the packing base.

Those are unique and vital parts of the brand's success, but there is one division that protects their interests and yours. Without it there could be no 25-year record of success and growth beyond sales of half a billion pounds annually. Haven't guessed it yet? Brand Assurance; trademark and product integrity.

Twenty years ago Wendy's Restaurants had Clara Pellar ask, "Where's the Beef?" Well, unlike any other mainstream brand of beef, we can tell you – from the packing plants straight through to the restaurants and retail grocery stores – who's getting CAB brand products, and sometimes more importantly, who is not. In a time when integrity, truth and trust are so important to consumers, we're proud to be able to say that we've been tracking CAB product movement for more than 15 years.

Starting with United States Department of Agriculture acceptance data (independent third party certification), pounds of the brand sold are tracked to CAB licensed processing and distribution companies, all the way to the restaurants and retail grocery stores that buy from them.

We dedicate five full-time staff to receiving and entering the hundreds of multi-page reports from licensees each month. That amounts to more than a million character entries on a keyboard each month. And if that's not enough, these entries are only accepted by the database if they are within tenths or hundredths of pounds.

The critical number crunch allows another group of the brand assurance team to ensure product integrity and monitor agreement compliance with our licensees. This team of four is responsible for making sure nobody sells more CAB product than they bought (or than USDA certified in packing plants). They're also charged with ensuring when a beef product is labeled or advertised as the CAB brand, that's what is, in fact, being sold.

During the past fiscal year we addressed more than 550 trademark infringement violations from non-licensed beef marketers. Not all of those were even buying the brand (a couple were trying to market their own, different brand but using our name). For those who were purchasing the genuine CAB brand

and understood what they were getting, it was an easy sell to get them on board; that's the ideal outcome of an infringement investigation.

When that isn't possible, we're willing to go to every extent to protect the trademarks – after all, they are all we own as a company. Sometimes that ends up getting costly, but in the process we have set some precedent through federal courts that now allow us to stay out of court more times than not. We're happy to report that, despite thousands of trademark infringement incidents through the years, we've never lost.

That's only half of being a trademark owner, however. First you have to get the trademark registered in the countries where you do business, and then you have to maintain it. Proper usage of the brand logo and name are essential to proving legitimacy of a mark, but it's even more important to make sure unauthorized use doesn't take place. With product hitting more than 50 international destinations, that's no small task. We rely heavily on our network of licensees and brand supporters to let us know when something is just not right.

Brand Assurance staff have been dubbed the “Beef Police,” the “Cops” and even the “Gestapo” by those who have had to deal with their unrelenting quest. But they remain fixed on keeping the brand name a valuable asset to CAB licensees, the label consumers can trust when they buy beef in their local supermarket or restaurant.

Some negative aspects go along with the job, but if you look a little deeper you'll see a marketing tool no other program has to offer. We level the playing field for all CAB licensees, so they know the guy down the street can't advertise his beef as CAB without going through the same procedures. And that builds camaraderie more than competition because they can interact confidently as the only local entities offering the best beef money can buy.

Everyone at CAB, from staff to the 10,000-plus licensees, tries to contribute to the long-term success of the brand. But without the efforts put forth in the area of Brand Assurance, there wouldn't be a brand to help market premium Angus cattle.

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