



CAB Corner on Quality
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Something for everyone?

By Brett Erickson, CAB Value-added Products Director

It's a struggle to make everyone happy all the same time; in fact, it can't be done. Somebody always wishes you had made a different decision.

The issue comes up all the time when we're developing value-added products for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand.. We want to find win-win deals, and we often do. But it's not automatic. Approving a new product that allows too much water, fillers or binders would cheapen the CAB brand's quality image.

Companies present us with many opportunities, and fortunately, many of those can be seen as premium categories that "fit the brand." They build its long-term integrity. Here are a few examples that met every test and became part of the CAB program in 2007:

- Dan's Prize, Gainesville, Ga.: Uniform, 2-ounce slices of CAB deli meats for foodservice.
- Freirich Food Products Inc., Salisbury, N.C.: London broils from CAB top rounds in Steakhouse style, garlic and herb, and Worcestershire marinated.
- Macgregor's Meat & Seafood, Toronto, Ontario: Cooked CAB short ribs, Thai beef in sesame garlic sauce and gourmet dinner sausages.

On the other hand, how do we recognize the perfect fit? Every day brings more decisions, so we go back to our foundation and mission statement: "Increase the demand for registered Angus cattle through a specification-based branded beef program to identify consistent, high quality beef with superior taste."

What decisions do you have to make in your business today? Some of them will affect your bull customers. Some of them will affect the long-term value of your brand. As with CAB, an expressed mission statement can guide you. It's a reminder of what makes you unique and valuable to customers.

Proceeding from your mission, identify four to six key strategies. More than that and you're trying to be something for everyone again. Don't lose sight of what's most important.

CAB's core strategy is to "maximize brand integrity." Every value-added product we approve must maintain that integrity. If it can't do that, it's not worthy to carry the brand's name.

Two more key strategies for CAB value-added products are to grow brand awareness and innovate with new products. That means stretching out into categories where we don't currently offer any products. We can only do that where we find categories and products that maintain brand integrity and a premium position. If these components are missing, it's not the right fit for CAB.

Many people put off decisions, planning only to “cross that bridge when we come to it.” Consider crossing it now. You know you’re going to be faced with a decision at some point, so prepare for it. When you know what to expect, the bridge itself is a non-issue. You can cross it with confidence that it keeps you on the right path.

Guidelines can help keep your program in balance and going down the right path, but you’re going to make mistakes. You can gather all the data, make all the calculations, put all the information on the table and still take a wrong turn. That’s OK, as long as you learn from it, turn around and determine what you will do differently the next time.

Taking the high road isn’t always easy. CAB has had several opportunities to sell several millions of dollars worth of new products, but did not take those roads for the sake of losing everything this company has strived to be over the last 29 years. At the end of the day, it’s not worth it to sacrifice who and what you are for the sake of a sale.

By focusing on CAB’s mission statement, following its core strategies and adhering to the guidelines we have established for value-added products, we have come far. We have grown brand sales by another million pounds in 2007 and most importantly, we’re confident that we did it with the highest level of CAB integrity.

These are basic ideas, but it doesn’t always take rocket science to move forward. Sometimes all it takes is a simple reminder so you don’t forget who you are and what you want to be. As long as you stay true to your values, you don’t need to worry about being something for everyone else.

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