



CAB Corner on Quality
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February 2008

Help for fish out of water

By Al Kober, CAB Retail Director

What does it take to become “Meat Director” of a large retail supermarket? What are the required credentials you would look for if you owned the company?

Let’s zoom in a little closer to home. Say you own a large cow-calf operation. You have invested several million dollars and you need someone with the experience and knowledge to run it. What would they need to know and what experience would you want them to have?

OK, zoom out again. Say you own a hospital, and several doctors have left for better pay, but now you need a brain surgeon. There’s no one on your staff who is qualified, so would you ask the foot doctor to scrub for the job? If the pilot of your next flight doesn’t show up and the airline asks the flight attendant to fly the plane, would you be comfortable with that?

Of course not. Yet, it’s increasingly common in the U.S. to find retail meat case directors with little or no experience in that field. They may be longtime, loyal, dedicated and otherwise excellent employees from other divisions of the company. They may know retailing; they may have even worked in perishables. But ask them where a sirloin steak comes from and they would not have a clue.

We recently heard from a very good, experienced produce director who had just become meat director, regarding an order of zero trim by 1-inch steaks: “What is an OX 1 strip? I thought CAB was all beef.”

This is happening with greater frequency today. As many large companies scale down, reorganize or otherwise try something new, they find ever fewer qualified people. Therefore, the poorly qualified are being asked to do more. Many times, what qualifies them for these vacant meat director positions is simply “availability.”

Of course, we all keep learning on the job, but the curve can be steep with unforeseen consequences. The clear rationale for maintaining a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) retail license to experienced meat directors is not always so clear to managers from other divisions.

If a meat director who understood all the benefits of the CAB program leaves, the replacement (in actual cases) may have been a deli, bakery, natural food or general merchandise director. On their first day, they have never purchased meat, nor do they know a top butt from a top round of beef. They have never done a cutting test or designed a case plan. They do not understand yields or know the different primal fabrications. They are like fish out of water.

These situations present a tremendous challenge and, of course, opportunity for CAB to help the new director become successful and to continue to support the CAB program.

CAB has a knowledgeable field staff that can become personal meat industry consultants, so the fish don't flop too far. Our quality people know the retail business and more—from the animal science of production, to harvesting, buying, cutting, merchandising, marketing and selling of beef. Most have been there and done that. If not, they have learned what it takes to run a successful department from those who do.

Just as Team Angus brings you the power of One, the CAB team functions with that level of knowledge and efficiency, capable of making each licensed retailer successful.

High quality delivers on promises, at every step from people to product.

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