



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

April 2008

The right technology helps

By Dave Shock, CAB Information Systems Director

For some folks, technology is a mixed blessing: one more complication to figure out. Others are “techno-junkies” who always feel the need for the latest devices and gadgets. Some of them find ways to use most of those things to improve their lives.

Part of my job at Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) is to evaluate the stream of new technology, looking for anything that could increase our productivity at a reasonable cost. That could be one of the hats you wear on the ranch, too.

You want to keep up with the times, and use innovations that save time and make money today, while building a better life and better market for your products in the future. That’s why you don’t become too much of a techno-junky. Just because something is available, or just because something can be done—those are not good enough reasons to buy or do anything.

What have you decided to adopt in the last year or two? We have added GPS (Global Positioning System) devices in our cars and “air cards” for our notebook computers. A short explanation would help:

Our GPS devices are portable, the small screen displaying a road map as you drive down the road, giving audible directions on which way to turn. It draws on a network of 27 orbiting satellites to get you directly from wherever you are to any address you enter. If you make a wrong turn or miss a road, the GPS automatically changes the directions to get you back on track to your destination.

This comes in handy for our staff when driving in large cities. You may be using or evaluating GPS for farming applications, and USDA scientists have used it to track grazing cattle and refine range management.

“Air cards” provide wireless Internet for our notebook computers, as long as they are within range of a cell tower. In fact, they are just little cell phones that fit into a standard slot in the computer. Using an air card means our staff need not rely on hotel or airport wireless connections, which may not be free or steady. They can use their time more productively while waiting at an airport.

Besides accessing email while they travel, CAB staff can connect to our internal network right there in a licensee’s office, entering or viewing orders and project status. I’m sure you have adopted communications technologies on the ranch, perhaps going back to two-way radios in the 1970s, and gradually, you have found cell phones that work in your remote areas.

As in cattle genetics, we have to separate distracting fads in technology from solid advances that will help our customers and employees. Impacts can be both positive and negative.

Take cell-phone text messaging for example. It can help CAB customers reach our staff more easily, and literally anytime, anywhere. But we must also consider how this affects the employees getting calls and texts at all times of the day. Will they be able to turn their phones off at night when they are home with their families?

It seems there's something new on the market every other week, but this fast pace of "progress" is relatively new. For thousands of years, farming was pretty much the same. Draft animals and drawn implements were the big innovations, replacing human labor. Only in the last 100 years have we seen self-propelled tractors. When they got electric starters and lights, then hydraulics, everybody had to have them or be left behind in a bygone era.

On balance, technology has been good to us, with our yield monitors and air-conditioned combines with buddy seats. We have GPS yield maps of our fields for variable rate fertilizer, planter or sprayer applications and GPS guidance that can steer automatically.

At CAB as on the farm, we manage best by ongoing and proactive evaluations of new technology, rather than letting the press of outside forces dictate what to try tomorrow. Most of all, we keep tomorrow in mind as we act to build one where more and more beef consumers have the chance to enjoy good, old-fashioned quality.

END