



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

September 2010

A healthy dose of moderation

By Mark Gwin, CAB Technical Services Manager

I vividly remember attending a graduate school seminar on a theretofore unrecognized hazard: trans fats. Of course, trans-fatty acids are now one of the targets in today's dietary and health-focused media. But what I recall most clearly is that adage tucked away at the end of the seminar presentation, "Everything in moderation."

Out on the ranch and breeding cattle, you live by that somewhat intuitive concept. My parents had instilled it in me, but that moment was my epiphany. I recall thinking, "Of course, everything in moderation."

We as humans, as omnivores, require nutrition from widely varying sources. We are not designed to live on high-cellulose plant matter like ruminants nor are we made to eat only animal proteins. As simple-stomach creatures, we need nutrients that don't require complex digestive processes.

The point is, the largest problem with the human diet today is not what we are eating, it is how much. We can talk all day about not eating this or that, but at the end of the day, the answer is still the same: "Everything in moderation."

That brings me to the real meat of this column.

You know all about moderation wisdom, but no doubt must contend with non-farm friends and family with other points of view. Why would they eat a Select or low-Choice steak when they could enjoy a high-quality, consistent and flavorful *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand steak? If they're doing it in the name of health, you can help them take a closer look.

In side-by-side comparisons, muscle for muscle, the fat content of the vastly superior CAB brand product only runs 2% to 3% higher than its Select or low-Choice counterpart. We know from evaluating fat percentages of the "29 Lean Cuts" identified by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

Our U.S. Department of Agriculture defines "lean" as 10 grams of fat, 4.5 grams or less saturated fat and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100 grams of product.

CAB tested steaks and roasts from the rib and loin as well as some of the new “value cuts” from the chuck and round. Although our test was not as extensive as an exhaustive USDA study, the results were consistent enough to warrant attention. Out of NCBA’s 29 cuts, 24 from CAB were within USDA’s definition of lean. The CAB cuts missing that category were just barely outside of the description.

The primary takeaway, the key point to share with your non-Angus friends is that the CAB specifications truly work, without reducing the health benefits of eating beef. The fat that’s in there has a grand purpose.

Our requirement for “A” maturity limits the presence of cross-linked collagen fat, which is found in older animals. It does not break down with heat like the non-linked version does to maintain juiciness during cooking.

The CAB exclusion of Brahman-influenced cattle also matters, because those *bos indicus* types are deficient in the enzymes that help break down the muscle fibers during the beef aging process.

Another significant CAB specification is the medium-to-fine marbling requirement, resulting in a more consistent product.

The bottom line here is that everybody can enjoy CAB whenever they want. Nobody needs to risk a mediocre eating experience with commodity Select or low-Choice beef.

Nevertheless, pop culture and media reminders will continue to insist that we should never eat fat—especially saturated animal fat. The steady drumbeat declaring the wisdom of vegetarian diets and the folly of consuming animal proteins will march on.

Perhaps out of step, we can still offer to share our scientific knowledge along with a dose of old-fashioned common sense.

As our friend and loyal brand advocate Al Kober used to say, “Take someone you love out for a *Certified Angus Beef*[®] steak.” Just do so in moderation.

END