



CAB Corner on Quality
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Communication: a pretty cool hand

By Mark Polzer, CAB Foodservice Director

Paul Newman's title character in "Cool Hand Luke" was often beaten while the prison warden pronounced, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." That movie was made nearly 40 years ago, and for at least that long, its famous quote has described the beef industry.

Perhaps the cattle and foodservice industries have never understood each other. Granted, there's a lot of curiosity, at least on the foodservice side. Any self-styled authentic steak house adorns its walls with the trappings and photos of cattle ranching. Beef producers who realize they grow food take pride in aiming for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand and enjoy a great steak at a CAB restaurant.

But do the two sides communicate? Almost never. It's time to break that failure of communication.

By creating a better understanding, producers will be more able to supply precisely what the foodservice operator needs and wants. At the top of the list now are these issues: not enough high quality product, carcass weights are too heavy, and prices jump all over. Overcoming these issues will help both sides become more profitable.

By increasing actively trying to communicate, we can create these opportunities from resources already in place. Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and its parent company, the American Angus Association, can provide the educational resources.

Start by inviting chefs and culinary and foodservice operators to your state or regional Angus tour. Restaurateurs are hungry for knowledge of the producer side, but don't ignore their potential as a communication resource. They will be eager to tell you of their issues and roadblocks, goals and plans for success.

Give us a call or email if you as a producer are interested in attending an American Culinary Federation (ACF) meeting. They have more than 100 chapters in all of the major cities in the U.S. ACF membership includes the best-trained chefs, and they would love to have a producer attend one of their meetings.

Reach out to the foodservice distribution industry. Again, ask us if you want to attend one of their food shows, find out where your product is going and how it is being sold. Have you ever actually visited a foodservice distributor cutshop and watched the "steaking" of your product?

We have and will continue to arrange round-table talks to foster more open communication. You have more in common than you may realize, because they're your customers. Here are some areas for dialog that producers might bring up:

- Does marbling and flavor make a difference to you?
- Do you want repeat customers, and if so, how do you make them?
- What size rib eye is the ideal for you?
- Can we become more efficient by working together in alliances?

On the foodservice side, operators want to know:

- Are there more unique cuts such as the flat iron and teres major that we can effectively merchandize to our customers?

- Are there better methods to market existing subprimals to combat rising carcass weights?

If our partners in the supply chain don't understand the constraints and possibilities, we will never be able to grow as one. Take a moment and plan a proactive course to improve our understanding of the entire cattle industry. Then we can celebrate the success created by increased communication, and nobody takes a beating.

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