



CAB Corner on Quality
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available on request)

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CAB “specs”

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This “Angus” thing has really taken off. Let’s hope the product lives up to the name—of course, with the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand, that’s no problem.

Specifications, or “specs,” are a set of standards or guidelines for a product or process that improve consistency. People know what to expect. If they like it, they will return again and again; if they don’t like it, they can simply remember that it does not suit their needs.

Take a rifle for instance. In the Revolutionary War, long rifles by the same gunsmith company were hand made and inconsistent in terms of replacement parts. That made it difficult to replace a trigger or hammer because there was no “jig” to create parts that were exactly alike. Until mass production with standards became common, any replacement part for these weapons was a challenge. Today, specs for a given model of rifle are such that one can order a new part and it will fit exactly as it’s supposed to.

CAB[®] has a set of specs, too. They are what set it apart from other commodity or branded beef products, ensuring that the consumer has a superior product every time. The brand has been so widely accepted by the consumer that in 2003 a record 583 million pounds of product were sold. While we made the specs, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) graders at harvest facilities determine if the cattle fit the bill. Only then can the product earn the trademark.

So, what makes CAB[®] stand above the rest? Since there are 32 different Angus programs out there, we’d like to clear up the confusion.

Besides the fact that the cattle must appear to be Angus-influenced and have greater than 51% black hide color, there are eight carcass specs:

- (1) Modest⁰ or higher marbling. Marbling is the intramuscular fat in the meat that adds to its flavor and juiciness. Carcasses that have a marbling score of Modest-0 qualify for average Choice. Most of the fed cattle harvested in the U.S. are given a quality grade by USDA graders in the harvesting facilities. These quality grades are: Prime (high, average, low); Choice (high, average, low); Select (high and low)

and Standard. Low Choice, Select and Standard beef will NOT qualify for the CAB[®] brand. Not all Angus programs have this as their standard.

- (2) Medium or fine-textured marbling. The marbling must consist of many small flecks of fat, as opposed to fewer, larger, and coarser characteristics.
- (3) Maturity. All CAB[®] carcasses will be of “A” maturity, or those animals less than 30 months of age. Beef from younger animals tends to be more tender than that from older animals. Some “B” maturity cattle qualify for the low Choice grade.
- (4) Yield Grade (YG) 3.9 or less. USDA graders also assign a yield grade to carcasses. YG 4 and 5 carcasses carry an excess amount of trim fat. Again, not all Angus programs have this specification.
- (5) Free from dark cutting characteristics. Animals that are stressed prior to harvest may produce carcasses known as “dark cutters.” Caused by a drop in blood glycogen levels, the beef takes on a dark brown to purplish color that is not attractive in the meat case. Sometimes it may have an “off” flavor as well.
- (6) Free from blood splash (internal hemorrhaging) in the beef.
- (7) No hump exceeding two inches in height. This indicates an influence of *bos indicus* (Brahman-type) cattle in the genetics.
- (8) Carcasses must exhibit moderately thick or thicker muscling and tend to be moderately wide and thick in relation to length.

The specs work. In a 2002 study by Oklahoma State University, CAB[®] brand steaks were more tender than USDA Select or low Choice steaks. In fact, the chance of getting a tough steak is 1 in 6 with a Select and 1 in 13 with a low Choice. But a CAB[®] steak has only a 1 in 50 chance of being tough.

CAB has been around since 1978, the only brand that is a subsidiary of the American Angus Association. There are a lot of “me too” programs out there, most of which have come about only over the past four or five years. We’re number one in terms of volume of product sold, number of cattle marketed into a branded beef program and premiums paid to producers—more than \$50 million last year..

Enough reasons to make CAB your next purchase at the restaurant or supermarket? These strict specs set us apart from the rest, truly, “Angus beef at its best[®]!”

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