



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

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(R)Evolutionary Changes

By Mark Gwin, CAB Value-Added Products R&D Manager

If you have been in the beef industry for long, you've seen astounding changes. I recall with great fondness going to Reese's Big Star in my small, Southern hometown, and watching Melvin the butcher at work. With beef halves hanging over a floor covered in sawdust and smelling uniquely of beef and smoke, Melvin was responsible for breaking, cutting, grinding and merchandising the whole carcass.

Then along came boxed beef, and orders by the wholesale cut; much was taken off the butcher's shoulders. Central processors realized savings in shipping and sales operations, and took most of the responsibility for cutting and product safety.

We can watch with satisfaction as another "revolution" evolves: separation and sales of individual muscle cuts. Beef has a distinct advantage with muscles that can be identified and merchandised according to their unique strengths—try that with chicken or pork! In fairness to the lesser species, however, it's more important with beef because differences in tenderness and succulence are much more pronounced.

Moreover, many of these muscles are highly influenced by quality grade. That's a distinct advantage for the world's premier beef brand. Leadership demands *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) be at the forefront in this industry movement. We are offering lower cost alternatives to new customers while pioneering on the cutting edge of this evolution. Our victory will be two-fold, with greater customer satisfaction and increased carcass utilization.

This will only work if consumers buy the appropriate cuts for their needs. As more new items turn up in the beef case, we must help retailers educate consumers. Otherwise, sad stories will be replicated endlessly. Consider this one: Joe consumer sees the eye of round and thinks, "What a nice, lean, thick-cut steak; maybe I'll grill tonight." He buys a tray, looking forward to a great eating experience. It sizzles too long, but that kills microbes, and besides, it's high Choice and should hold up on the grill.

Will it hold up on the plate? Joe finds it difficult to cut and not very juicy. With growing doubt, he takes a bite of the long-awaited steak and realizes, to his horror, it is tougher than shoe leather and almost as dry. "Maybe I'll buy chicken or pork next time," he thinks. "It's better and cheaper."

Stories like this involved a wider array of cuts when the marbling deficient exotic breeds forced a devaluation of USDA quality grades in 1976, which led to development of the high-quality CAB[®] brand. However, eye of round will never make a good grilling steak, even if it is CAB[®] Prime. That's why we must lead the effort to make sure the next Joe doesn't have that experience.

CAB works with the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) and Cattlemen’s Beef Board to maximize consumer satisfaction. NCBA has led in coordinating the scientific study of muscles, and we are exploring areas of common interest. Our brand goals dovetail with Beef Checkoff goals of promoting overall beef consumption and demand. We are uniquely positioned to take advantage of muscle profiling research as we pursue the utilization of “appropriate” muscles, for satisfied consumers each time they try CAB®.

One the most successful Checkoff promotions has been the “flat iron” steak, identified in research, separated from the chuck and marketed for its strengths. The CAB brand has built on this generic success with specific high-quality appeal.

Historically, CAB has done a terrific job of marketing middle meats, but there are many more ways to build demand if we look for new markets with customer satisfaction in mind. Like Melvin, we struggled to merchandise the whole carcass for years, always having trouble with chuck and round cuts. Thanks to this new focus on individual muscles, we are breaking new ground.

Here are a few examples.

- The chuck flap (*serratus ventralis*), or boneless short rib, is a tender and very succulent muscle from the chuck roll that is extremely forgiving on the grill, or great if cut thin and cooked in moist heat. Much of the large chuck roll contains muscles that are appropriate to cut and promote as steaks, which would add enormous value. There are not many weeks when we are short on chuck rolls.
- The shoulder clod, with its flat iron, shoulder tender and clod heart muscles, is enjoying much success, except for the latter, which tends to dry out. Marination is a great way to enhance the clod heart for grilled ranch steaks, and it works for sliced roast beef products.
- The knuckle, or sirloin tip, is actually three muscles: center, side and bottom. The tip center is very tender and succulent, yielding steaks that are very similar to the ball tip, from which it extends. The tip side is nicely shaped, but with texture similar to the clod heart, it is best for stew or cube steak. The tip bottom is ill shaped, oddly colored and difficult to clean. Still, it’s very tender and succulent, great for salads or fajitas.

All of these newly identified cuts are good candidates for a functional marinade, especially for a buffet, cafeteria or other “mass-feeding” opportunity—options that make them more attractive for larger chain restaurants. Individual CAB® muscles are, by definition, more consistent; marination just accentuates the consistency.

Our goal is to stay on the cutting edge of these huge industry changes by focusing on customer satisfaction and offering appropriate cuts for each need. We will continue to focus on the inherent advantages of the brand by identifying those cuts that are more improved by higher levels of marbling. For now, the sky is the limit. But our ultimate goal is to test all limits.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For a shorter column, omit the three bullet-point examples.