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NEWS

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Cowboy for a Day

Carrying a catalog with more than 10,000 items, from napkins to carrots and steak, foodservice sales is no easy job.

Specialized knowledge is often required. For example, a chef may ask about the beef: Where does it come from? What were the cattle fed? How were they handled at the farm? Being able to answer with confidence can make the difference and the sale.

“We wanted to share the answers to those questions,” explains Marty Berlin, a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) account manager. That’s why CAB, Facciola Meat Company and Sysco Central California organized “Cowboy for a Day” this spring, Berlin says.

Mark and Abbie Nelson, Five Star Land & Livestock, Wilton, Calif., served as hosts for 19 foodservice professionals. The day was full of information sharing about what goes into managing a registered Angus operation.

“We take any opportunity we can to invest in the public’s knowledge of what we do here,” says Abbie Nelson. “So much gets written by anti-meat activists that just isn’t true. We want to set the record straight. Plus, as seedstock producers, we learn a lot by listening to our end users. They make our industry happen.”

Ray Nicholas, Facciola president, understands the importance of training his team in cattle production basics.

“It allows us to complete the circle, to know and tell the entire story,” he says. “When we are asked how animals are raised or where, or what they are fed, it is nice to have the answers. Being the most knowledgeable on our products allows us a closer connection with our accounts.”

On a morning wagon ride around their ranch, the Nelsons explained production details from managing to marketing. They fielded questions on genetics, health, cattle handling, nutrition and land use.

“Our team was surprised to see that not just one rancher has the animal start to finish. They were amazed at the work and science that goes into giving each animal the best chance to qualify for the Certified Angus Beef brand,” says T.J. Leonard, CAB specialist at Sysco.

“Natural beef products have been common in California for some time,” says Berlin. “The group had lots of questions on the differences in the terms ‘natural’ and ‘organic’ and what was required of the producer. They had lots of questions on why producers use antibiotics and implants. This was a great way to get them the facts.”

They learned about genetic and measuring tools that improve beef as Brett Setter, Jackson, Calif., scanned a yearling bull using ultrasound. Their first look under the hide of a live animal showed marbling and the ribeye in real-time.

Other presentations covered cattle industry segments, managing for top quality, purebred cattle marketing and legislative topics. Bob Fox, lobbyist for the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, shared his unique perspective on answering hard questions related to animal welfare.

The day wasn’t all work, though, and Sysco used it as an award for their top CAB salesmen. Attendees were treated to a ride in a stretch Hummer, CAB® steak lunch and cowboy poetry by Norma Fox.

The job is still a challenge, but after being a “Cowboy for a Day,” the foodservice pros better understand cattle production. Few of their counterparts have been on a ranch and talked with producers about how they care for their animals.

“That extra credibility can be just the edge in converting another restaurant to the Certified Angus Beef brand,” Berlin notes.

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