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(In Chef Tour photo: Cornwall listens to presentation by John Stika, Certified Angus Beef president.)



Beef must win, place and show

By *Anthony Pannone*

Chefs and quality-focused ranchers are a lot alike, where keeping customers satisfied helps win the daily race for business profits. Chef Brad Cornwall bets the same trifecta with those ranchers: demand, profitability, consistency.

For the past eight years, this Texas native has run the kitchen at the 400-member Black Rock Country Club, a *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand-licensed leisure spot 15 miles south of Boston.

“I moved up to Boston of all places,” he says. “My mother actually moved here first and I thought, why not?” Life had already taken him far from his Lone Star roots. Before settling in the New England city, Cornwall graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York, and then moved to Germany for three years to hone his skills.

Now he knows that no matter where you serve, meeting customer demands is a challenge. “We have a young membership that is well traveled and well versed in fine dining,” Cornwall says. Their expectations are high.

The club competes with other restaurants in the Boston area, so going the extra mile in food preparation garners a competitive advantage. “It’s all about the service,” he says. “That’s the difference between going to a restaurant and going to a quality club.”

Yet, it does little good to wow them with service if the product disappoints. Supplying customers with a product he believes in drives Cornwall. After a visit to a cattle ranch in Colorado, on a tour designed to educate chefs about the beef supply chain, he says he understands enough to build a base of faith.

Knowing the science that cattlemen invest into producing consistently high-quality beef helps him in suggesting premium cuts. “We are looking for something that, if they have it, they are going to want to come back and have it again.”

Part of that “something” is a copycat of European dining. Club members experience it as a social event with emphasis on taste-and-portion, which Cornwall noticed in his travels throughout Europe.

“It wasn’t just hurry up, gorge your face and get out of there. It was a matter of eating to enjoy yourself, trying everything,” he says.

Think of the concept as wine tasting: You want a glass of \$100 wine without buying the whole bottle. Well, depending on factors in wine production—climate, region, fruit, to name a few—each varietal pairs nicely with specific foods. Cornwall applies this thinking to different cuts of beef and invents new dishes, building each around salads and greens.

“You are still socializing and don’t eat that much. Members want a little compromise on eating healthy,” he says. Don’t worry, sirloin and ribeye will always be there, and so will other cuts of beef customers might not get every day. Members still ask for a 24-ounce steak, Cornwall notes.

And they request beef for the total experience. “I mean, you go out to a restaurant to eat things that you don’t normally have at home,” he says.

At Black Rock, Cornwall’s outside-the-box motto hatches innovation. “As far as dining goes,” he says, “consistency for me is, really, not to be consistent.” He understands that if customers become bored with the menu, they go somewhere else.

The key is maintaining a supply of consistently high-quality beef that can stand up to a wide variety of preparations. It’s that demand for consistency at the finish line that sets this chef’s pace ahead of the pack.

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