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**NEWS**

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## Trends change; importance of quality stays

Food trends change with the times. Cattle producers learned how that affects them in remarks by Al Kober, of the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. The CAB retail director spoke at the Jan. 19 Cattlemen's Workshop in La Grande, Ore.

"Cattle producers must recognize that they are in the food business," Kober said. "Every animal you produce is going to be eaten, so you should focus on what consumers want."

Those expectations are more demanding than ever. Kober says today's consumers want more information about what they are eating. They also expect more and convenient choices, along with food safety and nutrition, of course. However, more than anything, Kober said consumers want a great eating experience.

"Taste is still the number one driver for consumers," he said. "That's good news for you as producers, because you can count on demand when you focus on quality. It's also good for CAB, because our 10 specifications identify the kind of beef consumers want."

CAB caters to consumers' other demands, too, Kober said. "They look at labels to learn more, so our retail labels have been redesigned to tell them more," he says, adding that CAB leads the industry in finding new beef cuts that offer more choices.

Kober said CAB spurred a growing trend in beef branding, from national to local store labels. Brands are important to consumers because they represent a commitment to providing a consistent product.

"The quality in these branded products has to be intrinsic, not superficial," he said. To increase profits, brand loyalty must develop. That hinges on the built-in quality and consistency of the product being offered. "That's where producers come in," Kober said, "producing real quality."

Another growing consumer trend is the natural and organic market. Kober said producers must understand that consumers demand these products because "they feel good about themselves for eating them."

Other trends play into that, such as health-specific and functional foods. Bottled water with caffeine and probiotics in yogurt are two examples.

Convenience foods, such as heat-and-serve meals, are part of another expanding market. Emerging ideas include eating "locally grown" and "carbon-conscious" foods, Kober said.

"Time will tell which are trends and which are fads," he added. "Regardless of all the other trends, consumers always look for a quality product. After all, the ultimate reason people buy beef is because it tastes good."

*Certified Angus Beef*® is the world's leading brand of fresh beef. Since 1997, packers have paid producers nearly \$250 million in value-based grid premiums for cattle accepted into the brand. For more information on CAB products and programs, visit [www.cabpartners.com](http://www.cabpartners.com).

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