

CORNER ON QUALITY



Making progress

By Mark McCully, CAB Assistant Vice President, Supply

It wasn't long ago that supply discussions within the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) office were pretty grim. What we call acceptance rate, or the percent of Angus-type cattle meeting brand specifications, was at an all-time low and trending lower. Even though you as Angus breeders were selecting for more marbling (the main reason cattle fail to qualify for the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand) and your commercial customers were striving to improve the consumer's eating experience, more high-grading cattle were not being found. It was a frustrating time.

I remember sitting next to Roy Wallace of Select Sires on a flight to a Beef Improvement Federation meeting in the summer of 2004. I had all my charts out, showing him the decline in quality grade, and I was challenging Roy to explain why we haven't seen any progress in marbling given the focus on that trait, within the Angus breed in particular.

"It's simple," he said. "Genetic selection is slow and it is going to take several more years before we see any change."

Well, I understood terms like "rate of genetic change" and "generation interval" from my animal breeding classes in college so I knew what Roy was saying. But it was probably the first time I had really thought about the application of those terms to the entire beef-cattle industry. The process of making genetic progress is truly slow.

Today, we have a very different outlook on supply. Those all-time low acceptance rates of 14% in 2006 have now improved to surpass 24% for 2011. It has been a long time coming, but now at last we have this amazing acceptance rate that was so long awaited.

In fact, it's been a multi-year upward trend in grading and we have been pointing it out for some time—you might even say we have been shouting it from the rooftops. And yet, I know of an Angus breeder who recently questioned the wisdom of selecting for marbling.

It would be one thing if he wanted to argue we have arrived (we haven't). However, he defended his position by saying, "If these tools worked, we should be seeing CAB acceptance rates going up, but they aren't." In fact they are, and I would argue a huge part of the increase in CAB acceptance rates and the overall Choice percentage in the industry comes from your steadfast and diligent efforts in breeding cattle with more marbling potential. I congratulate you; that's something to be proud of.

At CAB, we have continued to identify those who practice a focused genetic selection for higher quality beef, highlighting them with success stories in magazines and other media. If you know of a top-notch commercial breeder striving with increasing success to hit the brand target, we would sure like to know—maybe they could be part of a feature story.

We continue to work at helping producers guide their operations with the *CAB Best Practices Manual*, which includes EPD recom-

mendations. Some Angus breeders and many of the AI studs have started identifying the bulls in their sales or offerings that meet these standards as "Targeting the Brand," thus further pointing the way to genetic progress for the commercial sector.

The result of all this hard work on your part pays off when the consumer goes to the meat case or restaurant and has a great beef eating experience. That's good for Angus breeders, both seedstock and commercial, and for the entire beef industry. 🐮





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