



## Meat heads in the making

By Deanna Walenciak, CAB Marketing Director

Imagine someone who knows as much about meat, steaks and product yields as you do about grazing, breeding, calving and weaning.

Just as the love for ranching is in your blood, their love for the meat industry and selling the product you raise is part of who they are. They live to sell steak. They are meat heads.

Yet, the days of journeyed meat schools, or working your way up through the family meat business are becoming things of the past. Those who sell meat to restaurants today also sell thousands of other items, so it's hard to be an expert in that coveted center-of-the-plate meat category.

That's why the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Master of Brand Advantage (yes, that's MBA) intense training program focused on developing meat expertise and sales leadership.

This MBA program was designed with hands-on learning—right down to feeding the cows—and we welcomed 21 students who accepted the challenge to earn their masters in all things beef. The process started where all great beef starts: at the ranch. For many class members, it was their first time at a ranch or feedlot.

"You have a perception before you go to these things of how it's going to be," said Curtis Adams, U.S. Foodservice, Tampa, Fla., after spending a day on a Kansas commercial Angus ranch. "It totally blew away any thoughts and ideas of what I was expecting." Having heard all the talk in cities, he said, "I was amazed the actual land they are able to roam and the grass they feed on."

The experience helped prepare Thomas Chamot of Palmer Food Service, Rochester, N.Y., to answer customer questions. Seeing the "unbelievable amount of care, integrity and pride in what they do . . . it really gives me a lot more ammunition. My gun is fully loaded to answer questions," he said.

With the ranch foundation in place, the next stop was the feedlot. Class members spent an afternoon at Irsik & Doll Feedyard, Garden City, Kan., understanding high quality grains, the priority put on animal well-being and environmental stewardship.

Before and after the production segment of the MBA from CAB, students—up-and-coming meat sales professionals—were surveyed to collect their impressions of a commercial feedlot. The answers were strikingly different.

CAB staff briefed feedlot managers Mark Sebranek and Jerry Jackson on the advance results to help them focus their tour presenta-

tion last November. Among those preconceived notions:

- Large, crowded, dirty
- Massive herd divided into containment stalls
- Inhumane conditions and manure everywhere

After seeing things first-hand, being able to ask questions and meeting the feedlot team, the lights came on:

- Amazing how many cows were there and how clean it was. Just the finishing process for cattle.
- I now know there is a lot of care, concern and passion in the feedlots. It is not a buffet line and overcrowded living quarter.
- Cattle seemed comfortable and well cared for. Impressed at the care given to animals through the whole process.

The Kansas trip concluded with a tour of Cargill's Dodge City packing plant, and that set the stage for the second MBA session: carcass fabrication at The Ohio State University. Many "students" had been selling meat for years, but had never broken down a side a beef to understand sources.

"It is starting to make sense what we have been talking about and actually seeing where the cuts come from on the animal and to be able to explain it to our customers. I have a new credibility to explain that to customers," said Andrew Corsi, of Sysco Cleveland.

For the final week of MBA, it was time to apply knowledge in overcoming any possible sales objections from chefs or others to buying your product. Class content covered all the bases from meat science to cutting tests and product yields, ground beef, food safety and sales skills—all starting with the ranch experience and leading to meat heads who know their stuff.

Besides homework, graduates had to pass an intense final exam that had them presenting on the brand to CAB staff members. No worries after all the preparation.

"It's about confidence," said Scott Gasparini, of Buckhead Beef Company Atlanta. "I've seen it and done it and have the science and facts behind my words."

That goes all the way to real-world settings, of course. Adams, of U.S. Foodservice, said the MBA experience "helped me become the meat head that I always wanted to be. I can now talk to any chef and GM about beef and why CAB is the best program out there."

As these first MBA alumni apply the power of knowledge to sell more top-quality beef, applications are coming in for MBA II. Keep up the good work out on the ranch, where it all begins. 🐮

