



## The Key Ingredient

Angus families come together for the 42nd annual Cook-Off.

by Jessica Hartman, American Angus Association

Every recipe has a key ingredient. When it comes to the American Angus Auxiliary's annual All-American Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Cook-off, the key ingredient isn't the usual suspects — salt, garlic or herbs — but rather family. Now a much-anticipated event at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) each July, the event helps young cattle producers develop a better understanding of the consumer eating experience and confidently advocate for beef products.

"I've seen two generations of

participants come through the Cook-off now. We started 42 years ago," says Anne Lampe, longtime contest co-coordinator. "It is a contest that requires the entire family to be involved."

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members who compete are asked to write and perform a short skit that includes information about the ten specifications of the CAB brand. The skit is paired with the cooking and presentation of a designated CAB cut of beef (roast, steak or other) to a panel of judges —

usually dished up on-theme with the team's skit.

"This contest is a labor of love. It requires a lot of time and energy. But what it has grown into — the creativity is so amazing," says Melissa Davis, as she looked around the large event hall in Tulsa, Okla.

Contest day, the space designated for staging and preparation becomes a maze of juniors dressed up in costumes practicing their lines; parents cooking detailed meals using slow cookers and camp stoves; and elaborate backdrops, props and table displays decorated for themes ranging from boxing matches between beef brands to plays on reality TV shows.

The hard work required has never outweighed the joy of taking part in the cook-off for Davis, who has participated in just about every way possible through the years. First as a contestant, then as a junior board member working the event, returning as a judge years later and most recently as a parent.



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“Recalling my memories and then watching my daughter make her own memories in the same way has been pretty special,” Davis says.

### FUELING FOR COMPETITION

Her daughter, Maggie, and her teammates, Aubrey Bapst and Carrie and Lilly Gahler, are all from Ohio, but they and their families had to work remotely to come up with their skit and menu.

The theme? The Ohio State volleyball team has just won the national championship and is attending a press conference. Their secret to winning? Fueling their plays with CAB Buckeye Cube Steak Sandwiches.

“We all live in different areas of the state, so it is hard to practice. But we really came together as a team and accomplished that,” Maggie explains.

The families spent hours texting, calling, FaceTiming and testing recipes to come up with what the judges agreed was a winning



combination. The Ohio team took first place in the Overall, Recipe and Showmanship categories of the intermediate steak division. As the overall intermediate division winners, the team was also awarded the Pat Grote Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Award and received scholarships to help attend the LEAD conference hosted in Washington, D.C., this summer.

“Along with learning about what makes beef a good eating experience, I’ve learned a lot about how to speak publicly by participating in this contest,” Bapst says. “I want to be a teacher, so I am definitely going to use that in the future.”

Bapst’s stepmom, Jacy and father, Ryan, have seen Bapst

come out of her shell while taking part in the contest.

“It’s worth it. The kids are meeting others from around the state that they don’t typically see — actually interacting with them and having to work with them,” Jacy adds. “To see them get over their fear ... and be able to answer the judges’ questions so well, even the ones we didn’t specifically prepare for, that’s been fun.”

### COOK-OFF CHAMPIONS

In total, 30 teams competed in the 2025 cook-off. Along with division results (see Winners of the 2025 Cook-off sidebar), two

★ ★ ★ *Winners of the 2025 Auxiliary-sponsored* ★ ★ ★  
**ALL-AMERICAN CAB COOK-OFF**

**BLACK KETTLE WINNER:  
OKLAHOMA INTERMEDIATE ROAST TEAM**

<i>Steak division</i>		
<i>Junior</i>		
1	Texas	
2	Missouri (S)	
3	Virginia (R)	
<i>Intermediate</i>		
1	Ohio (S, R)	
2	Nebraska	
3	Virginia	
<i>Senior</i>		
1	Missouri* (S)	
2	Virginia	
3	Michigan (R)	

**PAT GROTE LEAD SCHOLARSHIP WINNER:  
OHIO INTERMEDIATE STEAK TEAM**

<i>Roast division</i>		
<i>Junior</i>		
1	Kansas (S, R)	
2	Missouri	
3	Illinois	
<i>Intermediate</i>		
1	Oklahoma* (S, R)	
2	Illinois	
3	Kansas	
<i>Senior</i>		
1	Kentucky (S, R)	

**ARDYCE’S APRON WINNER:  
TEXAS JUNIOR STEAK TEAM**

<i>Ground beef division</i>		
<i>Junior</i>		
1	Ohio* (S, R)	
2	Nebraska	
3	Iowa	
<i>Intermediate</i>		
1	Kansas (R)	
2	Illinois (S)	
3	Missouri	
<i>Senior</i>		
1	Kentucky (S, R)	

\*Denotes overall winner of the product division. S denotes first-place showmanship. R denotes first-place recipe.

additional awards, the Black Kettle and Ardyce's Apron, were announced during the NJAS closing ceremonies.

The Black Kettle Award was established in memory of Paul St. Blanc, a supporter and longtime friend of the cook-off, and is given to the overall team. The 2025 Black Kettle Award went to the intermediate roast team from Oklahoma. Team members included Denton Cook, Cordell; Joseph Davis, Council Hill; Bentley Lott, Carmen; Saylor Norvell, Tuttle; Sadie Plagg, Guthrie; and Gracie Stonebarger, Council Hill.

Ardyce's Apron was created in memory of Ardyce O'Neill, a past American Angus Auxiliary president who served as the contest's first chairwoman. The award goes to the junior Cook-off team with the highest point total. This year, the honor went to the Texas junior steak team. Team members included Whitney Beuerlein, West; Alleigh Blackwell, Iowa Park; Briella Humpert, Windthorst; Brystol Humpert, Windthorst; Hunter Miller, Canyon; and Cutter Murray, Perrin.

With four decades of similar stories, the Cook-off and American

Angus Auxiliary volunteers who run the event have succeeded in developing juniors to be rising leaders in the industry.

"They are learning [about beef quality and CAB specifications] in such a way that they can talk to their peers about it; they can talk to adults and the public," Lampe says. "There are quite a few who have gone on to be [National Junior Angus Board] members or be employed by Certified Angus Beef."



### ★ Route 66 Top Sirloin Roast ★

- |                                       |                                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 3-lb. CAB® top sirloin roast, trimmed | 1 Tbs. garlic powder             |
| 2 Tbs. coarsely ground black pepper   | 1 Tbs. crumbled dried oregano    |
| 2 Tbs. sea salt                       | 1 tsp. chipotle pepper seasoning |

- To prepare the roast, set it out to bring it to room temperature and pat it dry with paper towels. In a small bowl, combine ingredients. Sprinkle dry rub over both sides of the roast and press it into the meat.
- If using wood chips for smoking flavor, place them on top of your charcoal or in a smoker box. Preheat your grill to 400° and place the seasoned roast over indirect heat. Close the lid and lower the grill temperature to about 350°. Cook the roast until it reaches your desired internal temperature; doneness is usually achieved at around 135° for medium doneness. Plan on a total cooking time of 2 to 2 ½ hours.
- Once cooked, remove the roast from the grill and let it rest for about 20-30 minutes before slicing, allowing all the meat's juices to settle and ensuring they aren't lost when the roast is sliced.
- Carve into thick slices and serve with your favorite sweet sauce.



The Oklahoma intermediate roast team won the Black Kettle Award. Pictured (from left) are Emma Collins Powell, presenting; Joseph Davis and Gracie Stonebarger, both of Council Hill; Sadie Plagg, Guthrie; Saylor Norvell, Tuttle; Bentley Lott, Carmen; Denton Cook, Cordell; and Anne Lampe and Anne Patton Schubert, presenting.



The Ohio intermediate steak team won the Pat Grote Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Award. Pictured (from left) are Aubrey Bapst, Waverly; Carrigan Gahler and Lily Gahler, Graytown; Maggie Davis, Bidwell; and Tonya Theis, American Angus Auxiliary president, presenting.



The Texas junior steak team were the Ardyce's Apron winners. Pictured (from left) are Briella Humpert, Windthorst; Whitney Beuerlein, West; Brystol Humpert, Windthorst; Alleigh Blackwell, Iowa Park; Hunter Miller, Canyon; Cutter Murray, Perrin; and Anne Patton Schubert, presenting.

