

A Quality Meal Begins on the Farm

Young Angus producers showcased farm-to-table knowledge and advocacy skills during the 43rd Auxiliary-sponsored All-American Certified Angus Beef Cook-Off.

by Jessica Hartman, American Angus Association

It starts on the family farm and ranch,” emphasized Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Chef Michael Ollier as he looked out on the crowd of young cattle producers, their parents and advisors, during the orientation meeting for the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American CAB Cook-Off contest.

The annual event, now in its 43rd year, has become one of the most beloved contests of the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), hosted this year in Louisville, Ky., July 11-18th.

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members who compete in the Cook-off are asked to write and perform a short skit that includes information about the 10 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.

Ollier, who is the longest tenured chef at CAB and a spokesperson for the brand, was first introduced to the contest nearly a decade ago. The chef was eager to be able to take part again in the selection of the cuts used in the contest, the orientation and judging of the event.

“The connection made with the youth raising this product, it kind of changed my life,” Ollier expressed his gratitude to the crowd. “It really put it in perspective — your life is spent and your energy is put into these living beings that provide sustenance for countless people. And I’m able, in turn, to have a life in which my family is supported because of your hard work.”

Ollier’s reflections are a mirror of the intention behind the event that helps connect young Angus



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producers to the product on the consumer’s plate and confidently advocate for beef.

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Speaking to consumers

On contest day, a group of young producers stand in a circle running through their skit. The all-girls team from Missouri is competing in the Senior Steak division. Between lines, the girls chuckle about hiccups in their delivery or inside jokes that have developed over months of practice. But when they step in front of the judges, the team flawlessly executes every play in the script.

“Keeping with this year’s junior



show theme, Bases Loaded in the Bluegrass, we are the Rockford Peaches from the movie *A League of Their Own*,” described team member Clara Wallace. “Each of our starting players is a CAB standard.”

Through the skit, the Peaches describe the attributes of each of the 10 players, which ensure the coffee-rubbed baseball steak served up to the judges slides into home with a quality eating experience. In the end, the team deems the specification on marbling to be their Most Valuable Player.

“Always look for good marbling,” says team member Melaina Thiltgen. “It’s your flavor, your tenderness, your juiciness, and that’s the three most important things when it comes to a good steak.”

Although Ollier was judging in a different category, he would likely say the team hit it out of the park with their MVP call. He says not only is marbling important, but it is often the most visible characteristic and the easiest one for consumers to connect to.

“It can be overwhelming to stand at the meat counter and make a selection. Let’s make it easier for consumers to understand,” the chef adds. “If you took a ribeye, ripped all the packaging off and put it next to another one — what are we going to talk to them about? It’s the intramuscular fat, how much marbling there is.”

Just as it can be intimidating for the consumer to order a cut of meat, it can be intimidating for a young producer to advocate for the product they’ve had a hand in raising. That’s where the Cook-off contest’s skit and

Home Run CAB® Kebab

Baseball-cut top sirloin steak, cut in 1-in. cubes

Fruits and vegetables, as desired

Marinade:

3 Tbs. garlic paste

3 Tbs. cilantro paste

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup fresh lime juice

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. pepper

1 tsp. cumin

1 Tbs. soy sauce

Whisk all marinade ingredients together.

Marinate steak for 2-6 hours.

Once marinated, alternate threading cubes of steak with chosen fruits or vegetables. We chose pineapple and cherry tomatoes, as they would have a similar cook time. We recommend cooking the sirloin to rare to medium rare.

On a grill that is medium to high heat, rotate the kebabs for a total of 3-6 minutes, depending on desired doneness. Enjoy!



The Iowa senior steak team won the Black Kettle Award. Pictured (from left) are Emma Collins Powell, American Angus Auxiliary president, presenting; Lylah Houk, Blakesburg; Thea Zidlicky, Decorah; Eliza Patchin, Mitchellville; Cheyenne Houk, Blakesburg; and Anne Lampe, presenting. Not pictured is Madie Deutmeyer, Ryan.



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



Overall intermediate steak, Illinois' winning team. Pictured (from left) are Emma Collins Powell, presenting; Ella Eathington, Avon; and Claire Kuipers, Leroy. Not pictured is Addison Tebbe, Saint Rose.

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BASES LOADED in the **BLUEGRASS**

presentation portion of the event steps up to the plate.

Missouri team member Ella Coulter has competed in the contest for three years and says it has helped her become more confident in conversations with people of all ages.

"You're putting yourselves out there a lot, getting all dressed up and giving a big skit in front of a crowd of people, and then you're also learning more about Certified Angus Beef along the way," Coulter explains. "Because of that, it is so much easier when you take the silly costumes off and talk to people in the real world about beef quality."

Champions in the making

In total, 35 teams competed in the 2026 Cook-off. Along with division results, which are listed on www.njas.info, two 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 long-time friend of the Cook-off, and is given to the overall team.



WINNERS of the 2026 AUXILIARY SPONSORED

All-American CAB Cook-off

BLACK KETTLE WINNER: Iowa Senior Steak Team		PAT GROTE LEAD WINNER: Intermediate Steak Team		ARDYCE'S APRON WINNER: Texas Junior Steak Team	
Roast division		Steak division		Frankfurters division	
JUNIORS		JUNIORS		JUNIORS	
1	LOUISIANA (R)	1	TEXAS (R, S)	1	VIRGINIA (R)
2	IOWA (S)	2	MISSOURI	2	KANSAS (S)
3	OHIO	3	ALABAMA	3	GEORGIA
INTERMEDIATE		INTERMEDIATE		INTERMEDIATE	
1	ILLINOIS *(S)	1	ILLINOIS (R, S)	1	NEBRASKA *(R, S)
2	KANSAS	2	TEXAS	2	KANSAS
3	OHIO (R)	3	MISSOURI	3	GEORGIA
SENIOR		SENIOR		*Denotes overall winner of the product division. S denotes first-place showmanship. R denotes first-place recipe.	
1	VIRGINIA (R, S)	1	IOWA *(R, S)		
		2	MICHIGAN		
		3	MISSOURI		



The 2026 Black Kettle Award went to the Senior Steak team from Iowa, and team members included Cheyenne Houk, Blakesburg; Lylah Houk, Blakesburg; Eliza Patchin, Mitchellville; Thea Zidlicky, Decorah; and Madie Deutmeyer, Ryan.

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 Briella Humpert, Windthorst; Brystol Humpert, Windthorst; Hunter Miller, Canyon; Alleigh Blackwell, Iowa Park; Cutter Murray, Perrin; and Jordyn Green, Linden.

With four decades of similar experiences, the Auxiliary volunteers who run the event have succeeded in developing generations of juniors who are champions of the industry they grew up in and the quality product they raise.

"I am so proud of what this contest has become," reflects Anne Patton Schubert, who helped organize the first contest and has served as co-chair for many years. "It is so thrilling to see how much everybody loves it." AJ

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