

AUXILIARY NOTES

by Emma Powell, president

Time to Cook

Every summer, young cattle enthusiasts from across the country gather for the National Junior Angus Show.

The week is filled with competition, learning and friendships built around a shared passion for Angus cattle. Among the many contests, one event stands out for both its aroma and its life lessons: the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Cook-Off.

Youth tighten the knots on their aprons as the grills are heated up. The show barn is buzzing with cattle being washed and brushed, but here at the Cook-off station, the focus is different. In front of the contestants sits a perfectly marbled steak from the CAB program.

At first glance, the Cook-off seems simple: cook a great steak or other cut of beef and present it to judges. But for most, they learn it was much more than that. They had spent weeks preparing, studying different cuts, understanding the ten specifications for quality and practicing recipes. The Cook-off pushes them to learn the science behind beef quality and why Angus cattle are known for exceptional flavor.

In the distance you can hear someone say, "Remember to cook it medium-rare. Let the marbling do the work."

Before competing in the CAB Cook-off, some youth only think about raising cattle. The Cook-off opens their eyes to the entire journey, from pasture to plate. Through the contest they learn how consumers choose beef, how chefs prepare cuts, how quality programs like CAB maintain standards and how to explain beef production to people

outside agriculture. Teams design unique recipes, presentations, and educational displays showcasing innovation and leadership. The contest challenges youth to educate others while representing the CAB brand proudly and accurately.

When it's time to present to the judges, contestants don't just serve a steak. They tell the story of the breed they love. The Cook-off also brings something unexpected: teamwork and creativity. Teams brainstorm marinades, test seasoning blends and even practice plating like restaurant chefs.

Team members Casey and Paul kept it simple. A CAB ribeye with roasted vegetables.

"Your presentation is beautiful," one judge said.

Casey realized the Cook-off was helping him develop skills that went far beyond agriculture: cooking, public speaking, marketing, time management and creativity under pressure. By preparing dishes and presenting facts about beef, participants become ambassadors for the industry. They learn to communicate the value of high-quality beef to consumers, a vital skill for the future of animal agriculture.

The 43rd annual Cook-off will be hosted Monday, July 13, at the NJAS in Louisville, Ky. For more information on the contest, visit the American Angus Auxiliary website at www.angusauxiliary.com.^{AJ}

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