

Quality and Safety First

Certified Angus Beef LLC requiring Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) certification of new and existing processors.

by **Crystal Meier**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand goes beyond fresh beef to add value to high-quality Angus cattle. Since its launch in 1978, demand for premium and further-processed items, like deli meats and frankfurters, has brought more value for producers and choices for consumers.

As this innovative line progresses, staff work alongside processors to stay on the forefront of food safety, always the perfect match for fine quality.

“Third-party quality audits and HACCP [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points] were useful tools from the start,” says Brett Erickson, the brand’s director of value-added products. “They gave us information about processors as well, but growing need for consumer transparency in the industry requires new insight on food safety.”

In June 2012, CAB began requiring Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) certification for new processors and then started working with existing processors to become approved. The program was relatively new in the United States, yet the universal code allows sharing of product and food-safety information with multiple processors of all product types, plant sizes and geographic locations.

CAB staff found many processors already considering GFSI certification, most through the U.S.-based Safe Quality Food (SQF) program. Within SQF’s three tiers, the beef



brand requires Level 2 certification for food safety or Level 3 with added quality and management. Some processors who have worked through the food-safety requirements are eyeing Level 3.

On board

“We are fortunate to be associated with dedicated manufacturer-processors who embraced this opportunity to minimize risks by sharpening the food-safety culture within their facilities,” Erickson says. “Once we explained how it can be benchmarked to all food-safety certifications required by their customers, they wanted to know more.”

One of those processors is Hudson Meat Co. in Columbus, Ohio, where brothers Dan and Jeff Emmenegger use *sous vide* to cook deli meats, pot roast, prime rib and short ribs. Along with the consistency gained through this slow-cooking method, most products are custom-processed using



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customer-supplied fresh meats, offering a unique niche in the market. Many items have been CAB product since 1989, when Hudson became one of the brand’s first value-added processors.

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The family-owned processor was already maintaining HACCP approval, so Emmenegger was hesitant about adding costs for staff time, hiring a consultant or buying new equipment. He says the expense has been worthwhile, with a primary focus on rewording standard operating procedures to match the SQF code.

Hudson Meat finalized the desk audit in April, making minor wording adjustments. The Emmeneggers also worked through a plant audit with a consultant to prepare for the official plant certification audit in the next month.

They are already seeing changes in their business.

“We are now organized in a way that helps us level the field with large processors,” Emmenegger says. “Plus, our employees are more actively involved. They need to

understand why we do what we do and will take an active role in plant audits.”

Exceeding expectations

At Old World Provisions in Troy, N.Y., vice president Ross Shuket says he has gained insight to his team as well.

“We learned that when given the right tools and defined objectives (compliance with SQF code), our facilities and staff can exceed all expectations,” Shuket says. “Becoming GFSI-certified has allowed our current and potential customers to understand and believe in the work we are doing, too, and with that comes increased sales and growth.”

Shuket had also heard about the extensive amount of paperwork and the difficulty of first-time applicants to pass.

“Day-to-day management of the extensive paperwork can be challenging, but it holds our plants responsible and allows us to improve every day,” he says. “We wanted to make sure we were meeting and exceeding any new industry expectations, and we are.”

In Salisbury, N.C., Freirich Food Products also focuses on being a step ahead of regulations in the industry. It was an early adopter of HACCP in the 1990s so GFSI certification seemed like a logical next step.

“Once you get to the point of passing all those third-party certifications, this didn’t

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require much work,” says Freirich CEO Paul Bardin. “We refined our manual to fit within the SQF framework. The pieces were there — we just had to organize them for the new code.”

Bardin also noted how the universal certification has made doing business easier.

“Once we became certified, customers no longer need to send their own audit groups to our plant,” he says. “We only have one audit group now and under this umbrella, all of our customers’ needs are met.”

As CAB approaches two years into this transition, 85% of its manufacturer-processors are GFSI-certified. More are expected to be approved this year. All are moving a step ahead of the federal Food Safety Modernization Act.

“We are pleased with our progress and appreciate their ongoing dedication to our brand,” Erickson says. “We are proud to be on the forefront with these businesses on behalf of the Angus breed.”



Editor’s Note: *Crystal Meier is a publications manager for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*