



Open Gates



New York farm wins inaugural CAB Ambassador Award.

by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

One late afternoon, in a grocery store parking lot in a suburb just outside of Boston ...

That's not the typical setting for a "time when the bull got out" story, but it's a real-life tale Angus breeder Phil Trowbridge remembers well.

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand marketing team had asked the farmer to help with a grand opening at the newest location of a long-time retail partner. He traveled from his Ghent, N.Y., farm, bull in tow, to help start a dialogue with beef consumers. After a day of answering questions ranging from how much the bull weighed to how old he was, Trowbridge was ready to load the pickup and trailer — the same rig that often takes the 2,500-pound "house pet" known as Charlie Pride to the breeding pastures.

"I looked in my mirror and he had picked



all the panels up and started walking across the parking lot," Trowbridge recalls. "The only thing I thought was, 'Just be cool.' I stopped the truck and threw open the gate.

"The only thing he wanted to do was get

in the trailer because he was going to go see girls," Trowbridge says. "Everyone thought it was cute. I was about to have a heart attack."

Now every time he or his son and business partner P.J. Trowbridge bring a bull to the city, they add a few extra anchors to the panels.

Most Angus producers don't find themselves in that situation often, but that kind of thing has become as routine to the Trowbridge family as breeding cows or clipping sale bulls.

"Any time we call Phil and ask for anything — and we ask for some crazy things — he's always game," says CAB Marketing Director Deanna Walenciak, noting it's often a family affair.

The welcoming crew might consist of any members of the clan on any given day: Trowbridge's wife Annie; daughter-in-law

Miranda (P.J.'s wife) and the couple's two daughters, Daisy and Lily; and daughter and son-in-law Amy and Michael Alix and their two kids, Taylor and Tucker.

Up for education

Trowbridge Angus Farms received the inaugural CAB Ambassador Award for a continual willingness to go above and beyond when hosting groups and representing the brand.

"It's not like we're stopping by with two people to have a cup of coffee," Walenciak says. "We're bringing 100 meat cutters from Price Chopper grocery store, and we're stopping by for six hours. You've got to be up for the challenge."

They always are.

The neatly manicured farm sits nestled among eastern New York's rolling hills. The small pastures where 250 registered cows graze are sprinkled between wooded areas that reveal their true beauty each autumn, along with many "country homes" that city dwellers flock to each weekend. The Catskill Mountain range sits off in the distance.

"We really need virtually no notice. We're kind of ready all the time. That's just our mentality," says Trowbridge. It's not so much about keeping up the picturesque scenery as it is just part of an overarching philosophy.

"We're committed to quality, no matter what we do," he says. "We have horses, we have dogs, we have cattle, we have grandkids; whatever we do, we really concentrate on having quality experiences."

They put educational events on their calendar just as they might weaning or

balancing, except the former probably appears more often.

"We've kind of always been big in education," Trowbridge says. While working for Gallagher's Angus Farm in 1982, he started a semester-long internship program, kept it going when he went out on his own in 2005, and this year employed his 119th intern.

The love of education is coupled with a helpful spirit that was instilled in Trowbridge early on, growing up the eighth of nine children (four sisters, four brothers).

"If one of the neighbors needed 10,000 bales of hay put away, my dad would just say, 'OK boys, go do that,'" he says. "Everybody was always very appreciative."

Trowbridge often thinks of his own children and grandchildren when he's volunteering.

"They want to be in the beef business, and I think the only way we can make all that happen is if the whole community is healthy," he says. "If we don't have a healthy community, well-educated, well-rounded, they won't be able to continue in this lifestyle."



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In addition to hosting CAB groups, which range from retailer and foodservice training sessions to media guests, Trowbridge opens his doors to college classes, to National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) guests and many others.

"It's become something we look forward to," he says, noting he learns from the visitors as well. When Trowbridge does customer meetings, he says, "It's helped us a lot on how to know the ins and outs of how the whole system works."

Not only does Trowbridge Angus Farms supply commercial producers with high-quality genetics, but also insights into the entire high-quality beef production chain.

Getting to know you

Trowbridge has a little bit of a home-court advantage when it comes to connecting with consumers, because his rural setting is becoming more urban all the time.

"There are 20 or 30 neighbors who adjoin our farms that are second-home owners. They come up Friday night and leave Monday morning," he says, noting that his family is always cognizant that those residents come for the quiet. "We don't wean calves



► "She (a reporter visiting Trowbridge Farms) was an extremely well-educated, knowledgeable person, but when she saw cattle on green grass she was like in shock: 'Do they do this often?'" Trowbridge says, noting the wakeup call was mutual. "I didn't realize that there were some people that just assumed cattle were in a feedlot all the time."

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on weekends or we don't drive through their driveway. We find another way in and out."

They hold a hot dog and hamburger feed a couple of times a year to get to know those neighbors. The first one was more than a decade ago, and nobody was more surprised by the turnout than Annie.

"We didn't let my wife get involved because we knew she'd want to make potato salad and beans, so we didn't even tell her about it," Trowbridge says. One night when she got off her shift as a full-time nurse, Annie drove up to a yard full of people.

"It was awesome, because we got to meet some people we've never met. We developed a relationship with these landowners," he says, noting they lease more than 90% of the 1,000 acres they manage.

Relationships are important when things don't go as planned. One April morning, Trowbridge saw a couple dozen heifers standing on a neighbor's lawn — the lawn that the advertising executive paid landscaping professionals to maintain each week; the lawn that bordered that man's in-ground pool.

"I get my feed bucket, and I'm kind of quietly calling them, hoping they are going to just walk off this guy's yard," Trowbridge says. "As you know, springtime and heifers are feeling good. They jump straight up in the air, spin around and come charging at me, and all I can see are big divots all over this guy's yard."

When he called to offer to make it right,

the landowner simply joked, "Are you going to charge me for the fertilizer?"

That kind of rapport comes from good communication, but beyond talking the talk, it's backed by action. Trowbridge cares for the land and livestock in tandem. He says he hopes he is passing that lesson on to his children and grandchildren.

"I can't impress on them enough that I want them to take responsibility for what they're doing, and I want them to feel very proud of what they've accomplished," he says.

Scott Yelle, vice president of merchandising and marketing for Sysco Connecticut, brought his entire sales force — something unheard of in the fast-paced foodservice business — to the Trowbridge farm for training last summer. He says that mind-set was evident, and carried over to the 75 or more attendees.

"It gives them some emotion tied to the story, feeling like, 'Wow, I see where this is coming from,'" Yelle says. "We don't always get to see the product; we sell the box. This gives them confidence in selling CAB and real sense of ownership and pride."

Connecting with an Angus producer gave the brand a face, and that's motivating, he says. "Phil is a great storyteller, and people just gravitated toward him."

When people leave the farm, they have their own stories of seeing firsthand this place where the brand begins. Some are told in restaurant kitchens as a salesperson closes the deal, and others are told from behind a meat

counter as an urban mom tries to make a supper selection.

Still others make their way to the pages that millions will read.

On two separate occasions, Trowbridge hosted food journalists who write for publications such as *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *USA Today* and *Bon Appétit*.

One reporter made an impression with her first impression.

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It's moments like these that inspire Trowbridge to keep opening up the farm gates. Whether it's a photo and video shoot for the latest CAB advertising campaign or busloads of meat merchandisers touring his pastures, Trowbridge is happy to help.

"There's nothing I'd like better than to bring every consumer to the farm," the breeder says.

Each year, one-by-one, he's getting a little closer to that than most ever will.



Editor's Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

