



Your Link to



by **MARK GWIN**, *research & development manager, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

BIG ideas add value

Most industries are steeped in tradition, and the beef industry is certainly a prime example. The first beef processors harvested the whole carcass and used “everything except the moo.” All cuts were treated the same — and cooked to extremes — because of the types of cattle, production methods and lack of refrigeration.

The system made sense, it worked and few thought it could change.

Then, along came the terminal livestock markets and the giant packers. Names like Cudahy, Swift, Armour, Eckrich and Hormel built around these stockyards, riding high on the new invention of refrigerated railcars.

Carcasses could be shipped to large markets in the eastern U.S., but to make large carcasses manageable, they had to be broken into smaller pieces. These came to be known as wholesale cuts: the chuck, rib, loin, round, brisket and plate.

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Then the guys at Iowa Beef Processors

(IBP) figured out that it cost money to ship bones around the country. “Boxed beef” was born, meaning cuts that are boned out to leave salable muscle and merchandisable product (bones were left in cuts like loins and ribs to order). This eliminated much of the cutting-room waste, reduced transportation costs and, perhaps most important, allowed the customer to selectively order only the cuts that could be most readily merchandised.

The system made sense and worked, but the industry had developed enough that change would occur more rapidly. More than a few people worked toward further innovation. They were driven down that path, as in most other industries, by convenience, efficiencies and projected cost savings.

Road to change

Along that path, there have been exciting developments. But methods used to break the carcass — developed for convenience — became the standard

by which the beef industry operates today. The result is the separation of muscle groups that should naturally remain intact.

Recently, we began to realize the system doesn’t make so much sense, and could work better with changes.

That leads to the work that the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) is doing by means of a group of industry and academic professionals called the Beef Innovations Group (BIG).

These people work to find ways to increase demand for beef. One strategy is to follow a familiar path: identify higher-quality muscles to separate from those standard wholesale cuts. The flat iron and the *teres major* promotions are examples of similar past efforts.

BIG is focusing on the muscles of the chuck roll [20 to 22 pounds (lb.)], looking for ways to add value to this complex. Historically used for roasts, the chuck roll is often discounted as “loss leaders” to attract retail customers. A key to adding value here comes from Japan and Korea,

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where retailers recognized the value of individual muscles and separated them to add value in their markets.

The other large outlet has been ground chuck, which now appears to be a gross oversight, considering potential added value from whole muscles. But we have to keep in mind the recent instability of access to the international markets that have added value to the chuck roll. Lasting answers must come from within the U.S.

With the decline in demand for roasts, some creative retailers separated a

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“chuck-eye roll” from the underblade portion, and made a few chuck-eye steaks from the back end. It made a lot of sense, because the back end of the chuck-eye roll is the front end of the ribeye.

This is an extension of the ribeye and is rated just as tender, according to Warner-Bratzler shear force (WBSF)

measurements used to compare differences in meat tenderness. So, it’s a great idea — but it only yields 2 or 3 lb., leaving 18 to 20 lb. of roasts to be sold near cost or to be ground.

Realized potential

Although BIG has not invented

anything new, it has scrutinized these remaining muscles and found new ways to sell them.

The largest muscle in the underblade portion is also one of the fourth-most tender (WBSF-measured) in the entire beef carcass. This extension of the “short rib” muscle can be merchandised as

“Denver steaks” or “country-style ribs.” It can also be cooked “low and slow” and marketed as a roast similar but superior to a “Texas-style brisket.” A smaller muscle in the underblade is similar to the flank, so it can be sold for fajita strips.

These solutions are huge, because the underblade makes up more than half of the wholesale chuck roll.

Since the quality of *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand cuts is superior to Select or low-Choice, steaks can be produced from the entire rib-end half of the chuck-eye roll, leaving the neck-end half as country-style ribs or as those low-and-slow roasts. With CAB, the whole chuck-eye roll can also be cut end-to-end as attractive country-style ribs.

In our pull-through demand economy, these BIG ideas can lead to greater utilization and sales of each CAB carcass as branded product. And that is the key to passing more premiums back to where it all starts — on your ranch.



CAB STAFF CONTACTS

206 Riffel Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-8588
phone: 330-345-2333; fax: 330-345-0808

www.cabpartners.com

John Stika, president
Brent Eichar, senior vice president
Tracey Erickson, vice president, marketing
Mark Polzer, vice president, business development
Larry Corah, vice president, supply development

SUPPLY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Kansas staff:
CAB Program Satellite Office
1107 Hylton Heights Rd.
Manhattan, KS 66502
phone: 785-539-0123
fax: 785-539-2883

Larry Corah, vice president
Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist
Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist
Wendy Nichols, office and data manager
Miranda Reiman, industry information specialist

Ohio staff:
Mark McCully, supply development director
Christy Johnson, supply development marketing director
Lance Zimmerman, supply development marketing manager
Marilyn Conley, administrative assistant

INDUSTRY INFORMATION DIVISION

16360 Victory Rd., Onaga, KS 66521
phone: 785-889-4162

Steve Suther, director

To order CAB merchandise, visit
www.angussalebarn.com.

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