

Creative Cutting Keeps Consumers

Creativity is the solution for getting desired products out of today's heavier carcasses.

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Take it or leave it.

Too often, that's the attitude the beef industry has taken with its customers, but in an effort to retain and grow demand, a third option has emerged. It's a "we'll help you deal with it" kind of approach, explained Phil Bass, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) meat scientist, at the 2012 Feeding Quality Forum.

Economic incentives continue to point to heavier carcasses, but what does that mean for chefs?

"People's stomachs aren't getting that much bigger," Bass said. "People are getting bigger, but our stomachs aren't getting that much bigger."

As those beef primals get bigger, simply cutting steaks into larger portion sizes isn't an option, nor is cutting thinner steaks. Bass illustrated that at the late-August meetings in Grand Island, Neb., and Amarillo, Texas, by fabricating a ribeye for the attendees.

"Middle meats — the striploin, the tenderloin, the ribeye — traditionally have been fabricated as a large piece and you start cutting steaks right down from one end to the other," he said.

However, cutting a specific and relatively small portion size out of a large primal can create a very thin steak. That makes cooking a challenge.

"Raw or cremated — those are the two degrees of doneness you can get with that steak," Bass exaggerated to make his point. "If you're in a restaurant and you pay \$30 for this, you're going to want it cooked the way you ordered it."

A thicker cut looks better on a plate, he said. "It also gives chefs a little more cooking flexibility. It helps maintain that flavor, juiciness and tenderness that are so critical for palatability."

Getting creative

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Cutting a filet of rib from the center leaves behind parts of that valuable primal, which then become tasty and tender medallions or tournados. Another option includes cucina steaks and then tying the remainder into a farmer's roast or roulade.

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"Any major subprimal you can think of, we have an alternative fabrication style that you can use to break down these big carcasses," Phil Bass, CAB meat scientist, said.

style that you can use to break down these big carcasses," Bass said. "We give the customer what they want, instead of saying, 'Here's what I've got.'"

The larger carcasses haven't brought only challenges, he noted.

"Can we have a high-quality animal and still have a lot of meat coming off that animal?" he asked. "Absolutely. We're seeing it today."

Producers are getting more value out of each head, and historically higher grading trends have been good for the end users, too.

"As marbling increases, so does the overall eating experience, so does the overall value to the consumer," Bass said.

The trick is in education and training on what to do with the changing carcasses. CAB is an active participant in both arenas, teaching merchandisers the cutting mechanics and providing marketing materials to help sell consumers on the new offerings.

"We're using what you folks produce and trying to make that connection and that balancing act," Bass said, "because if they don't eat it, you're out of business."

The seventh annual Feeding Quality Forum meetings were co-sponsored by CAB, Pfizer Animal Health, Purina Land O' Lakes, and *Feedlot Magazine*. For more information about the conference, visit www.cabpartners.com/news/events/FQF2012/index.php.



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

