



QA culture backs award winner

It's a long way from 'conception to consumption' for a piece of quality Australian beef sitting on a plate in a restaurant - be it in Brisbane, Tokyo or Moscow.

So exactly what's involved in delivering the 'perfect' steak to Aussie beef customers around the world?

Aided by the use of Pfizer's Suretrak DNA fingerprint product verification technology, Queensland Country Life has made an effort to find out. We scrutinised a recent national award-winning sample of beef, examining the key links in the production chain responsible for producing it, and searching for those 'little things' likely to turn a good piece of beef into something great.

Last August, the Brisbane Show held the nation's most important beef taste test evaluation, the 2008 RNA branded beef competition, attracting 26 high quality entries from every Australian state. The striploin and roast samples presented to nine judges represented a wide spectrum of breeds, feeding and finishing regimes and management systems.

The championship went to Stockyard Beef's Stockyard brand, established by Robin Hart

and family back in 1973. The winning sample was drawn from a 378kg carcass from the company's longfed Angus program, grainfed for about 220 days at the Kerwee feedlot near Jondaryan, and exhibiting an AusMeat marbling score of 4+.

Stockyard's marketing general manager David Clark said the company's longfed Angus program was predominantly export focused, with 85pc of the output heading overseas. Most loin cuts, for example, are directed into the high-end food service trade in the Middle East, Russia, and Southeast and North Asia. A little finds its way into the upper end of the domestic hotel and restaurant trade.

As the Meat Standards Australia grading system has

clearly displayed, no single attribute in isolation can produce a successful beef experience. Rather it is a hundred little things that add up the sum of how a good steak performs.

A breakdown anywhere along that sequence can impact on the end result. Below is a snapshot of what went into the end product.



Breeding/growing:

THE calf was bred by Jonny and Lissy McDouall, McDouall and Co, Double-B Beef Alliance members located near Bingara in Northern NSW.

While the McDoualls aim to grass-finish their MSA-accredited steer turnoff, feedlot placement is the option when seasonal conditions are less favourable. The taste-test winning steer was part of a consignment of feeder steers sold to Stockyard in August 2007 through Andrew Wilkie, Objective Livestock



Marketing.

The McDoualls look for good all-round herd bulls carrying positive EBVs for marbling and growth. The calf was probably sired by a Glen Avon, Booramooka, or Clunie Range bull.

The business puts strong emphasis on nutrition, and avoiding setbacks during the growing phase. This calf was early-weaned in the yards in January last year due to dry conditions, and fed on a maintenance ration based on wheat stubble, wheat and protein meal. After rain, he was turned out onto lucerne and then oats, gaining 1.45kg/day over his final 100 days prior to feedlot entry. The main aim is provide a forward plane of nutrition prior to feedlot entry.

Transport:

EXPERIENCED drivers and attention to detail are the haulmarks for successful operations for Tarcoola Transport, Inverell which was responsible for the uplift of the winning steer.



Manager Pat Waters said the business put strong emphasis on training in both loading and unloading operations, as well as the transit stage itself. The company was fortunate to have experienced drivers - often with 20-30 years on the road - and they played a strong role in mentoring new recruits.

"We aim to recruit people with strong previous livestock experience as trainee drivers, rather than try to convert general transport drivers into livestock specialists," he said.

Close attention is also paid to loading densities, curfew protocols and other aspects that can impact on the success of an uplift. Modern, anti-bruise Byrne trailers also contribute to the process, and feedback from abattoirs provides evidence of low-bruise performance.

Feedlot:

IT IS no coincidence that Stockyard's Kerwee feedlot where the winning steer was fed

is a three-times winner of the coveted Feedlot of the Year competition. Close attention to detail and a systems-based approach to cattle and pen management are the keys to the Kerwee business.

General manager Jim Cudmore said under individual animal risk assessment procedures, the winning steer would have been classified as a 'low risk' animal on arrival, receiving a single Rhinogard vaccination against respiratory disease at induction.

A four-stage feeding program is applied, targeted at customer-driven outcomes. Two-stage starter rations are fed, followed by an intermediate and finisher ration. The predominantly barley/sorghum diet is steam-flaked for optimum utilisation. Pen management (in terms of both cleanliness and formation) is another strength, which can have broad impacts on cattle health and performance.

Effectively 100 percent of the Kerwee feeding pens carry shade protection. Pen stocking densities are low, by industry standards, being about 4sq m higher per Standard Cattle Unit than the industry average.

Timeliness of feed delivery is also important for both animal behaviour and performance, with a continuous feed strategy applied.

Processing:

THE export plant where the beast was processed in Southeast was one of the first in

Australia to adopt Eating Quality Assurance principles, and has since adopted all the MSA pathways principles into its standard operating procedures.

All cattle are now killed to these pathways, regardless of whether they are destined for an MSA/EQA-active market or not. All staff are heavily immersed in the business's culture of eating quality and food safety performance. The plant's overall daily throughput capacity also makes that easier to achieve. Pre-slaughter, cattle come under low stress stock handling management principles, with advanced Temple Grandin yards in use. Post slaughter, the attention focuses on management of the whole process such as monitoring pH and the critical refrigeration process. The plant utilises Plenum chamber chiller designs, rather than conventional fixed down-draft chillers, which provide superior circulation of chilled air for optimum carcass management.

Cold storage and distribution

CAREFUL management of the cold chain through to end users is a key consideration while the product is in Stockyard Beef's hands, either in shipping container, trucking or air-freight.

This applies right through to the choice of superior performing freight-forwarders, shipping companies and airlines. The continuity of 'best practice' philosophy has been used by Stockyard for a long time, and was recognised last year with a Jaguar/Gourmet Traveller Award of Excellence last year.

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