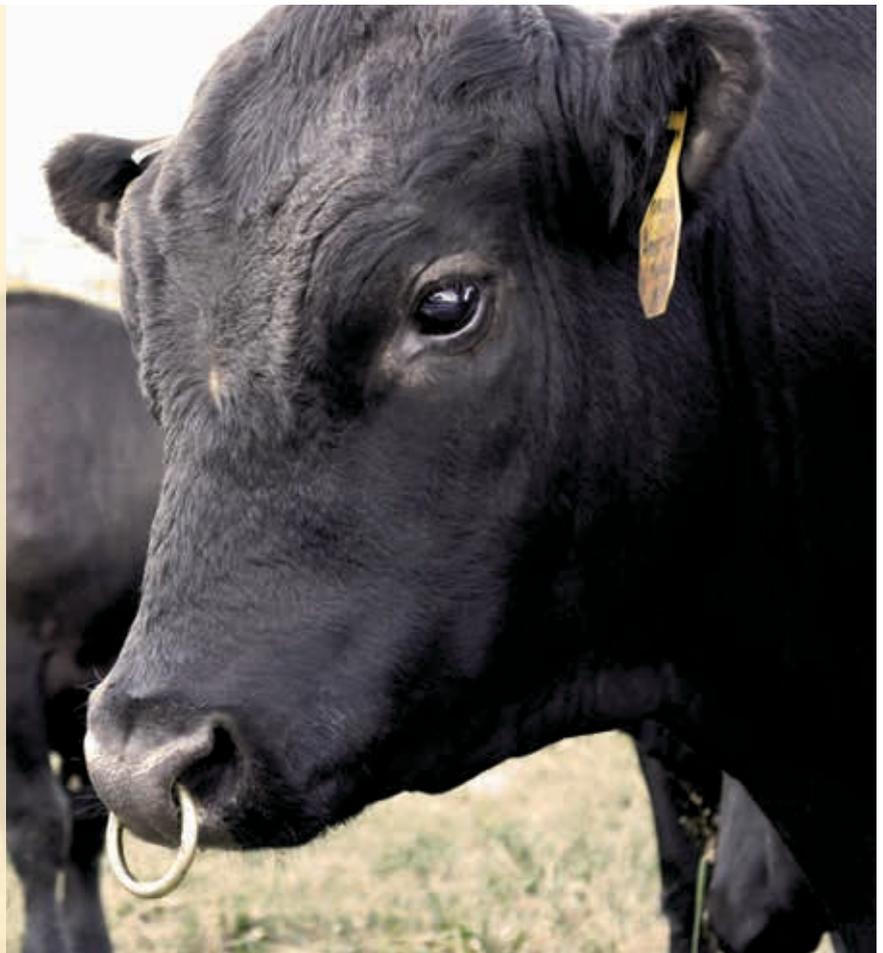


Steak House Bulls

Meat company executive starts Angus herd to guarantee supply.

by **Kasey Brown**, senior associate editor



If you ask cattlemen what the hardest part of raising cattle is, you might get varied responses, but marketing will probably be a consistent answer. Seedstock breeders, especially, rely on sound marketing to sell their high-quality genetics. They need quality-focused customers to provide a quality eating experience for consumers.

Now turn that formula around. When a third-generation meat purveyor has astronomical demand for high-quality beef, supply could be the issue. So Meats by Linz CEO Fred Linz decided to start his own herd of Angus cattle to supply his meat company, and in so doing is changing the beef-supply game. He started two new branded-beef programs through this endeavor — Linz Heritage Angus and Linz Heritage Angus Genetically Verified. The latter of the brands now has high-end steak houses co-owning Angus bulls to give their customers a complete story of the steak.

Actual conception to consumption

How do you get a steak house to buy a bull?

In 1963, Linz's grandfather Martin Linz started a neighborhood butcher shop in a Chicago suburb. Now, more than 50 years

later, Meats by Linz is still owned and operated by Linz family members, and it has grown into one of the country's premier meat purveyors, supplying meat to some of the top steak houses, country clubs, casinos and hotels across the country.

Michael Luna, Meats by Linz executive vice president of operations, explains that Meats by Linz is Chicago's largest independent meat purveyor, servicing customers across the United States and

around the world. They have a white-tablecloth focus and further process meat to customers' particular specifications.

Glenn Davis, head of genetics and herd development for Linz Heritage Angus in Crown Point, Ind., explains that Meats by Linz supplies top-quality beef in large quantities, noting that the top three steak houses in the country alone require some 25,000 steers a year to meet their needs. However, they don't just need 25,000 steers;



► CEO Fred Linz decided to start his own herd of Angus cattle to supply his meat company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINZ HERITAGE ANGUS

they need 25,000 steers that grade Prime.

Four years ago, Linz took matters into his own hands. He started his own herd of Angus cattle in the effort to meet this supply and give consumers confidence in knowing the whole process, right down to a steak with the sire's name. Davis explains that Linz bought about 200 registered-Angus females, including the top donors and embryos in the breed, and is continually increasing the herd size.

"To become an elite herd, we needed to kick the door in. It's a very competitive business," Davis explains.

Though he's no newcomer to the cattle industry, having worked with Riley Bros. Angus for many years, Davis says he has learned much about the meat side from Linz.

"There's so much behind producing a high-quality product than a lot of cattlemen realize," he says.

Acknowledging that it is highly improbable to supply 25,000 steers from one herd alone, Linz Heritage Angus works with cooperator herds that are bull customers who agree to meet especially stringent qualifications. By having a genetic component to the program, all cooperator herds must breed Angus on Angus, and females must be third-generation Angus blood.

"We want the highest-quality females — all Angus females, because nothing cuts like an Angus. We promote genotyping to keep the quality up. We will reject herds," Davis admits.

Linz Heritage Angus buys the steers from their customers so they own all the cattle through the branded-beef program. Davis says the genetically verified program has maybe a year and half to go before full fruition.

So, where do the steak houses come into the picture?

Partnerships and relationships are a big deal to Linz. For the first time ever, Linz partnered with two of the nation's top steak houses — Manny's in Minneapolis, Minn., and St. Elmo's in Indianapolis, Ind. — in buying the bull RB American Made 197, which started the genetically verified idea. This allows progeny of American Made to be served to those restaurants' customers.

Another big aspect of Linz Heritage Angus and Meats by Linz is waitstaff training. The waitstaff at these high-end restaurants

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PHOTOS BY KASEY BROWN

are top of the line and make their careers in these restaurants. Davis says he educates the staff about why they chose the Angus breed and talks in-depth about genomics, embryo transfer and high-density genetic profiling.

The greatest and most frequent question these waiters get is about hormones in beef, and they need a specific answer to that. He asserts that with the correct genetics and management of those genetics, additional hormones aren't necessary. By owning most

of the process, Linz Heritage Angus gets considerable data back on their cattle's performance, and they can share this data with customers. These training sessions are what set Linz Heritage Angus apart, because, he admits, most Angus breeders don't have the opportunity to talk to waitstaff.

They have hosted classes at the farm in Indiana for waitstaff and chefs, where

they get to see the sires and dams. Davis explains this helps soak in the "why" behind using Angus and their restaurant's steaks.

"These seminars help the breed in general because it keeps consumers informed and happy," he notes.

The waitstaff and chefs have toured the Meats by Linz fabrication plant, too.

Davis adds, "It's amazing to see a room full of people soak up knowledge, especially that it all goes beyond a black hide."

Manny's has even started to bring top customers to see American Made calves. Having a hand in the beginning of the process creates more buy-in for the restaurants and creates incredibly loyal customers.

Starting with demand

Meats by Linz specializes in fabrication and custom aging, both wet and dry, and the meat company processes the equivalent of about 3,500–4,000 carcasses a week.

Most of the processing work is done by hand on "center of the plate" cuts from primals and subprimals. They do a bit of work with pork, veal and poultry, but specialize in beef, which is why Linz Heritage Angus came into being.

Quality processing is a big draw, because nearly all of the work is done by hand. The company goes above the normal qualifications set by the North American Meat Processors Association and created their own "Chicago Trim" standard, Luna explains. They are also known for their custom dry aging. They have a state-of-the-art dry-aging room that boasts ultraviolet (UV) lighting, and humidity and temperature control with constant air flow. They dry-age specifically to customer's specifications, up to 85 days.

Additionally, they go beyond daily USDA

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inspection and are Safe Quality Food (SQF) Certified. SQF Certification is recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative, and it is the only program to integrate a quality component in addition to food safety. It is one of the most challenging certifications to receive in the food industry, Luna notes. The intense Meats by Linz sanitation program is a large factor in this extra certification. They have an entire shift dedicated to daily sanitation of the whole facility, validated by a third-party laboratory.

While the company started in 1963, its facilities have changed quite a bit. They were in the original building until 12 years ago, Luna says, but then moved to its current location a few blocks away, and have already added on to the building twice. He notes they are in the process of a third expansion, which will triple their cooler space. Meats by Linz has 20 trucks of its own to deliver locally six days a week.

Involvement of multiple generations is nothing new to those in agriculture, and family is also a large priority to Fred Linz. Linz is the third generation to own and operate the business, and his oldest son works for the company. Luna is a second-



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generation employee himself, starting when he was in the seventh grade by cleaning up the parking lot and working his way up through the company. Linz, COO John Majchrowicz and Frank Luna (Michael's father) took the company to the next level to focus on quality middle meats.

Davis adds that Linz is a hands-on CEO and is busy all the time, but still makes time

to watch Davis's daughter show her cattle. Davis even notes that Linz has mentioned wanting to find a place for Davis's daughter to join the company, should she want to when she gets older. Family, partnerships, attention to detail and commitment to quality are major success contributors for Meats by Linz, and those same traits serve Linz Heritage Angus well.

