

# When Beef Thanks Chicken

*A value-added products team works with partners to create items like Beeftisserie.*

*by Sarah Moyer*

U.S. retail stores sold more than 245 million pounds (lb.) of fully cooked beef last year. That might sound good until you read all of the *Power of Meat* survey: retailers sold seven times more ready-to-eat chicken than beef.

Much of that was rotisserie style, and beef aims to capture a fair share with its own Beeftisserie®. It was introduced last fall by Golden West Food Group, of Vernon, Calif.

Shoppers won't stop buying rotisserie chicken, but they'll likely come in another time for a beef meal, says Mark Gwin, product integration manager for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

"It's not replacing chicken," he says, "but selling chicken's customers a higher-quality, more flavorful product, too."

Where do ideas for value-added beef products come from? How does one idea rise to sell alongside a giant like rotisserie chicken? The answers come down to value in the eye of

the consumer, Gwin says. Anticipating demand is always the goal.

"Consumers are going to give you the idea, and you move that idea into reality," he says.

## Cuts with opportunity

Each story of how that happens is unique. The Beeftisserie idea started decades ago when Gwin worked for a retail company.

"Every morning I'd see a lineup of chicken trucks, and I wondered what all those chicken trucks were unloading," he says. "It was ice-packed chicken, whole birds. They were preparing those in rotisserie cookers, and I noticed there weren't any other proteins there."

Chicken costs less and has held popularity in the market for some time, but Gwin saw an opportunity for beef and other proteins alongside it.

"I've always seen a need for several things: No. 1 is utilizing what used to be called 'value cuts,' and I like to call them opportunity cuts," he says.

Anyone who knows Gwin knows he likes to consider the chuck roll in many of his projects.



Through a "Smoke Craft" line, Double L Ranch Meats sells both smoked brisket and burnt ends to foodservice businesses.

"It's got such high-quality muscles in that huge piece of meat," he says. However, "it had so many seams, so many parts and pieces you have to go through," labor overcame the price-value relationship. "That's one of the reasons we could not make it work for Beeftisserie."

In the 1990s, he was working to develop beef cuts with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), which was attempting rotisserie-style items with knuckle from the round.

"I told them, 'You guys are using the wrong cut — you're going to have to specify something to do with quality or something to make it more consistent,'" Gwin recalls.



The rotisserie cooking method demanded it.

The project didn't pan out at the time but it would much later, when qualifications for consistency could be included.

## Ready-to-eat meat

Consistency is a constant for value-added products, but it does not always begin as an idea based on a proven product like fully-cooked rotisserie chicken.

A first-of-its-kind "burnt ends" product sells well in foodservice for CAB-partner processor Double L Ranch Meats, a Lower family brand in Richmond, Utah. Though the company didn't begin with value-added processing, they quickly realized the opportunity to move in that direction.

"We've seen a lot of growth," says Lee Lower, specialist with value-added products. "My great-grandpa started our business, but we were just doing custom slaughtering for the local farmers and ranchers. As the generations shift and things evolve, people are always looking for closer, ready-to-go and ready-to-serve



This family company began in Smithfield, Utah, and has moved to nearby Richmond as it's grown in size and number of value-added products.

characteristics of products."

Foodservice orders are bread and butter for the Lower family.

"We try to make something that's easy for our customers to serve, and something we know will be successful," Lower says. "Recently we just got the burnt ends on a menu at a large football stadium."

Convenience pleases foodservice, but it's increasingly relevant to home cooks. Double L Ranch Meats even sells CAB London-broil flank steak and a smoked, sliced brisket through Amazon.

"Our foodservice customers want to try our products, and Amazon allows us to ship these same products right to their door," Lower says. "Cattle ranchers or people that live out in rural areas can still get the products that anyone can get in the big city, and we're trying to make sure we can get those products to them."

For Beeftisserie, it's convenience feeding the demand for young professionals and families.

Gwin says price is no big hurdle because beef is a higher quality protein than chicken.

"Millennials want what they want, when they want it, how they want it, and they want it now," he says. "And price isn't necessarily an inhibiting factor for them."

The product also appeals to an on-the-go audience because there are no bones. Consumers expect a single or whole-muscle piece of meat, Gwin says. That's why the chuck roll was traded for the tri-tip to create the ideal Beeftisserie.

As a recipe for success, each new product needs buy-in from the CAB Value-Added Products Division, a processor and a selling point such as a retail chain or foodservice distributor, all believing in it.

Last summer, Gwin approached Zack Levenson at Golden West Food Group about a rotisserie beef item.

"I loved the idea from the instant he brought it up," Levenson says. "They were working on this formulation, apparently for a long time. We put it all together and made it happen."



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The product launched late this past fall at the CAB Annual Conference. Next, it was time to partner with a retailer to sell it.

Meijer's in Toledo, Ohio, tested Beeftisserie in a fall 2018 rollout, and it's predicted to expand from there in 2019.

"We could think of the best thing ever — and it just might be the best thing ever — but if it doesn't translate over to the average consumer, then we have a failure on our hands," Levenson explains. "It's a planning process."

The ability to adapt Beeftisserie for other uses has quickly become important for its success.

"It's not just the wonderful roast that you get in the hot bar," he says. "It's the repurposing of the product. They could shred it and make a pulled item for example. Or they can slice it."

Pushing through the process from an initial idea, to recipe tests with

processors, numerous rounds of troubleshooting and finally on into the market — is it worth it?

Gwin, Lower and Levenson all say yes, and so do others who work with adding value to beef.

"A value-added products division is a very integral part of any organization at this point in time," Gwin says.

There's always something new in the works, something to grab the taste buds of tomorrow's consumer. In the past, CAB brand beef bacon by Schmacon™ made waves. Processor Colorado Premium finds success with a corned beef product. Fajita meat, frozen ground beef patties and beef franks remain as other popular items in further processing.

"As we get into the Amazon age, it's going to be extremely important that we're able to say, 'We make the product consistent. CAB certifies the quality of the product,'" Gwin says. "We, by definition, make it more

consistent in quality."

With consumers demanding convenient proteins, the fully cooked meat market rose 1.7% in 2017, according to those Nielsen statistics in the *Power of Meat*. From an idea to the hands of consumers, one setback could prevent the product from holding its share in the market, so teams move forward and collaborate.

These signs affirm optimism for the success of value-added products like Beeftisserie. In this case, beef has chicken to thank for paving the way.

"People can depend on going into Food City or Kroger or Costco or Meijer's or wherever, at 5 o'clock at night, and they have dinner for their family at 5:30," Gwin says. "The retail rotisserie chicken program has bred dependence on that area of dinner."

Now it's time for beef to have a spot at the table. **AJ**

*Editor's note: Sarah Moyer is a former Certified Angus Beef LLC intern.*



The Lower family's processing company, in its fourth generation, continues to prioritize quality meat for their value-added products.