

Supplying the main course for a steak fry some 15 years ago launched a marketing method that now moves 200 or more home-fed steers a year from Greiman Angus Farms, Garner, Iowa. Don Greiman, who is in partnership in the enterprise with his father Addis and brother Cliff, tells the story.

"We were invited to an exhibition game in Minneapolis shortly after the Vikings had made that their home," Greiman recalls. "Friends of ours there had invited about 10 couples for the game as well as for dinner, and we offered to supply steaks and sweet corn. I prepared the steaks and the other guests just couldn't get over how good they were. They wanted to know what the chances were of getting some of that beef for themselves. I said I thought it could be arranged."

At the same time similar requests were originating back in Garner. After a steak dinner at the Greiman home, guests' reactions were the same as those in Minneapolis. "Can we get some of this beef?"

"That's when we decided to start catering to that trade," Greiman says. "We have never advertised. Word of mouth built our market to such an extent that within five years all of our fed beef was being moved through the local locker. Even that boosted our trade. The locker people started promoting our beef, recommending it when anyone wanted to know where to buy beef. They claimed ours was the best of any beef they slaughtered."

#### Long-Time Feeders

The Greimans were not new to cattle feeding. Addis started feeding cattle years ago; in fact, he was probably one of the first feeders in his county.

And a number of the beef animals are home-bred. After the top half of both the spring and fall calf crops produced by the Greimans' 135-140 purebred Angus cows are sorted off as seed stock material, the rest go to the feedlot. Since that amounts to 50 or at the most 60 head, the Greimans buy additional animals to meet their market's demands.

"Of course," Don says, "I won't sell our customers anything but Angus beef." He claims it is a standard product on which they rarely get complaints. The number of repeat customers and customers' letters attest to the beef's popularity. "We can't believe beef is this good." "It is the best we have ever had." "Why can't we buy beef this good in our meat markets?" All are commonly written comments.

"Our complaints," he says, "are almost nil. I would guess they would be less than



Don Greiman (right) and his brother Cliff inspect the ribeye on a recently slaughtered carcass.

## CUSTOM ANGUS BEEF (Greiman Style)

*Iowa breeders' high-quality dependable product finds an excellent market. And it all started with a steak fry.*

by Ann Gooding

.5%. That's why, when we sell to a new customer, we can feel certain that if he likes good beef he will probably be back for more. I am sure I couldn't do that with any other breed. You just don't have to worry about Angus. It is simply a standard product."

That's why Greiman, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Angus Assn., was interested in development of the Certified Angus Beef program. Because his own customers reacted so favorably toward Angus beef, he felt the association-sponsored program would be a success.

### Side Effects

Greiman points out, too, that the farm's marketing of custom beef has some desirable side effects. The Greimans A.I. extensively to top performance sires, and carcass data on offspring of the different bulls is at their fingertips. "When the animals are slaughtered and ready, all we have to do is go in and take a look at the ribeye and do some measuring. We can compare different sires, which gives us another dimension in our breeding program."

The market is year round, a definite advantage, but the demand is probably heavier from September through June when people spend more time at home. But Greiman adds, "People do like those steaks for summer cookouts."

And Greiman lists another advantage. "There are always animals that top out sooner than others. Instead of holding those animals, we can take them out whenever they are ready." This works especially well, he says, for several reasons. Not only can these animals be used as they top out, but in this kind of market there is demand for the lighter weight carcasses. Older couples and people who don't have large families want carcasses weighing about 1,000 lb. So the smaller animals fill their needs, the customers are happy, and the Greimans get a premium for animals that wouldn't necessarily command it in a regular feedlot situation. "Those animals," Greimans explains, "are not necessarily inefficient up to

the 1,000-lb. mark. It is holding them that extra month or two to move them with a load that makes them inefficient." He adds that he is seeing fewer and fewer of these smaller animals, though, as Angus steers have developed so much stretch and scale and size.

### Premium Price

The Greimans price their beef at a premium, roughly 10¢ higher than choice. When beef is high, when they are making a good profit, they charge a little less than that. On the other hand, when beef is cheap they take a little more margin. Greiman says people really don't seem to care. "Surprisingly, we could probably maintain the same margin whether prices are high or low. And it is not necessarily the most affluent who are our customers. People from all walks of life buy from us. We have a lot of steady customers, and after a while most of them don't even bother to ask the price.

"And we do have customers who like prime beef and don't care how much it costs." Whenever they can, they honor requests of those and other repeat customers with special preferences. Most customers, though, want a carcass grading somewhere between two and three, with some covering and just enough trim to give the meat tenderness, juiciness and flavor.

Garner is about 160 miles from Minneapolis-St. Paul, where some Greiman meat is marketed. But the main trade area is within 50-100 miles of home. They are fairly close to some heavily populated areas—Mason City, Des Moines, Forest City—and they do market there as well as locally. Friends in Chicago have suggested that the Greimans get a refrigerated truck and haul beef there, going so far as to offer to do the merchandising. Although they aren't planning to expand, Greiman admits it is probably something to think about.

### Virtually Care-Free

But as it stands, their marketing system is virtually care-free. They don't have any long hauls and they are not affected by labor problems. They live within several miles of two lockers, so when demand dictates, they simply load up two or three head and take them to town. At that the trip usually serves more than one purpose, Greiman claims, because someone always needs to go to town for something.

And they keep their merchandising simple. "If we were in a metropolitan area, we could probably sell hindquarters and forequarters," Greiman says. But because their market is rural Iowa, they merchandise strictly halves or halves of halves, dividing cuts equally. Greiman says that the first time those people who want only steaks and roasts buy the custom beef, they are concerned about what they will do with the hamburger. But hamburger, he says, is one of their product's best selling points. Customers find it compares favorably with ground round. The kids love it. And Greiman home-fed Angus beef has earned another steady customer. 