

Clearly a Matter of Taste™ in the Windy City

Dominick's meat department works to earn the trust of their Chicago-land customers.

BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON

Years ago families were dependent upon their neighborhood butcher, a man who really knew his craft. He carved to order Prime cuts of meat and delivered them to customers' homes.

Families today are too busy to shop and to cook, and they have different opinions about a good eating experience than they did just a decade ago. Today's health-conscious generation pays close attention to fat and cholesterol.

To add to the mix, Chicago — home of the Union Stock Yards— has a strong tradition with quality beef. Most Chicagoans are great steak eaters and recognize high-quality meat, according to area retailers.

To fit those needs, Dominick's, a 109-store chain in the Chicago area, has chosen the *Certified Angus Beef*™ brand as its signature beef product.

"Dominick's has always been noted for quality meat," says Pete Traina, vice president, meats, seafood and deli pre-pack. "That is one reason why we chose the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program. It is helping us fill the needs of our customers who want a good, quality eating experience in a piece of beef."

Tracking the pulse of its customers is how the company has flourished during its 73-year history in the Chicago area. Traina says the factors most affecting consumer buying decisions today are:

1. Price

Consumers demand value for the money they spend.

2. Quality

"Lack of consistency," Traina says is the biggest complaint they receive about beef in general. Consumers want to buy a product that will be consistent each time they take a bite. In a beef product they want



Pete Traina, vice president,
meats, seafood and deli pre-pack

tenderness, juiciness and flavor. *Certified Angus Beef* product, he adds, has helped resolve the consistency problem for Dominick's and its customers.

3. Convenience

"We need to be convenient for the customer, and we need to have all of the convenient items for them to buy," explains Traina. Offering *Certified Angus Beef* value-added products helps meet this demand. This winter Dominick's did a demonstration

program promoting *Certified Angus Beef* pot roasts. Its deli department also carries *Certified Angus Beef* roast beef.

4. Food safety

Food safety is a major issue for food processors, Traina says. All members of the beef chain need to work to ensure the wholesomeness, quality and safety of beef products.

Offering quality and variety

Over the years, Dominick's has segmented its customers into groups based on their buying preferences. Currently, Traina says their beef-buying customers can be divided into two groups:

1. People who are looking for leanness and value; and
2. People who want a quality eating experience when eating beef.

As the groups have changed, so has Dominick's product line. Originally a Choice house, Dominick's switched eight years ago to offer Select and Choice beef. In 1993 it dropped Choice and brought in *Certified Angus Beef* product.

"We thought we had the best of both worlds" after adding *Certified Angus Beef* product to the product line, Traina explains. "We had *Certified Angus Beef* brand for the quality beef eater looking for flavor, and we had Select for the customer wanting value and leanness.

"If we just carried Select beef, we didn't think we would be able to satisfy the needs of all our customers," he says. "We still have customers who want a good eating experience."

Certified Angus Beef product was first introduced in Dominick's stores with service counters. Then, in 1996, the product was made available in all stores. The chain carries *Certified Angus Beef* middle meat



products, such as ribs and loins, and occasionally end meats including chuck. It also offers *Certified Angus Beef* roast beef in its deli department.

Educating the customer

Traina stresses the importance of educating customers and encourages producers to spend their money and resources developing educational programs.

The company is considering hosting meat universities at selected stores. The events would focus on promoting *Certified Angus Beef* product. The store's meat manager would spend time on the retail floor talking about *Certified Angus Beef* product and passing out recipes and literature.

It is the responsibility of the beef industry and the retailer to educate consumers about proper cooking methods, says Traina. He compliments the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) for developing recipes to stick on packages of beef to promote ways of how each beef cut can be prepared.

Demand diminishing

Traina says the demand for beef is diminishing and will continue to do so if the industry as a whole does not work together to promote beef. "The biggest obstacle facing the industry is going to be convincing people beef is good for them to eat," he says.

He credits the nutrition labeling law for increasing awareness of fat and cholesterol content. Adding to the negativity is that medical books, articles and personal visits to a doctor often encourage consumers to eat less red meat.

Producers need to genetically breed leaner cattle, reducing fat on the outside of the carcass, not marbling or intramuscular fat, says Traina. This step, along with promoting the nutritional benefits of beef, will help offset the bad press.

Angus producer's role

Success at the meat counter starts at the seedstock and/or commercial level. Traina says producers need to be more consistent — consistent in how they raise cattle, in pricing and how they send their cattle to market (size).

He compliments producers who breed cattle that meet *Certified Angus Beef* product specifications, but encourages producers to continue to genetically breed cattle with a high-quality carcass and reduce excess fat cover. According to Traina, Angus producers are on the right track.



Dominick's offers *Certified Angus Beef*™ product in its service and self-service counters. Customers can choose from a variety of middle meats and occasionally chuck meats. The company strives to conveniently serve its customers, as well as offer convenient products.

Promotional efforts

To increase consumer awareness of its beef products, Dominick's advertises in several media venues, including newspapers, radio and television. It also uses point-of-purchase materials in each store specifically promoting its *Certified Angus Beef*™ product. Because of its success in advertising and promotion, the company was awarded the Excellence in Advertising Award from the CAB Program in 1997.

The company uses key phrases such as: "Best tasting beef in town," and "Why buy *Certified Angus Beef*? The difference is taste, texture and quality."

Some special promotional projects by Dominick's have included: a TV commercial promoting *Certified Angus Beef* product; grocery bags printed with the *Certified Angus Beef* logo, *Clearly a Matter of Taste*™ motto and the Dominick's logo; and an advertisement and coupon in the Fresh Value Card (frequent shopper) promotional brochure.

When opening a new store, the company does a 10-day demonstration promoting *Certified Angus Beef* product. The demonstration is designed to introduce the store's new customers to the *Certified Angus Beef* brand.

