



Beef and the Meat Case

by Lisa Hawkins

The responsibility of product development lies in the hands of the retailer, wholesaler, packer and producer, according to Bob DeYoung, merchandising manager of Spartan Stores Inc., Grand Rapids, Mich.

DeYoung graduated from the National School of Meat Cutting. Prior to working for Spartan, he was responsible for buying, merchandising and advertising meat products for an Eberhard Food Company local store. DeYoung has been with Spartan Stores, Inc. since 1978.

"Beef sales have leveled off," DeYoung says. "And they won't increase until better methods of presenting beef to the consumer are developed."

New packaging methods are being developed. For example, Felpaush Stores, a branch of Spartan, stocks Excel's vacuum packed beef.

The product presented to the consumer needs to be convenient, easy and quick to prepare. Beef isn't there yet.

"Beef products need to take the form of precooked, oven and pan ready state," says DeYoung.

DeYoung has seen the decline of beef and rise of poultry sales. The meat case responded to the consumer's demand for a leaner beef product.

"In order to meet the consumer demands at the meat counter, we have moved from one-fourth inch trim to one-eighth inch trim steaks," says DeYoung.

Consumers' lifestyles are changing dramatically. Today people are fast-paced and fast-food oriented. They place a high value on time and are willing to pay a premium for convenience.

Current statistics show more than 43 percent of all meals are eaten away from home. This figure is projected to reach 50 percent in the 1990s.

"The modern consumer is willing to experiment, but they require preparation instructions. Above all, they will not sacrifice taste," says Gary Bales, Affiliated Food Stores Inc., in Michigan.

In order to meet the needs of the ever-changing consumer, the retailer must provide microwaveable products

that can be prepared in less than 30 minutes.

"Convenience will shape our future. Those of us who market toward convenience and maintain quality will reap the biggest return in sales and profits," says Bales.

"It is the retailer's job to present the product to the consumer. We must listen to the consumer and apply the heat where it is necessary," says DeYoung.

DeYoung believes the beef checkoff is a great program.

"Unfortunately, the beef industry went too long without a promotional campaign and that is when the poultry industry merged ahead," he says.

DeYoung adds that one of the most successful marketing campaigns is the "Other White Meat" slogan of the pork industry. "More of this type of thing has to happen in beef," says DeYoung.

While sales may have leveled off, beef is still the No. 1 tonnage item sold through Spartan Stores Inc. Pork and poultry are close competitors for the second position.

Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) and EXCEL are the major beef suppliers of Spartan Stores. USDA Choice beef is popular at the meat counter. "Consumers want tenderness and taste with no fat," says DeYoung.

One of the most effective point-of-purchase advertising ideas is the availability of recipes at the meat counter, according to DeYoung.

The future of the beef industry looks bright to DeYoung.

"One of the main goals is to convince the consumer that beef is okay," says DeYoung. "My advice to the producer is to develop an animal that will turn into a product with the same

tenderness and flavor of today's beef, but without any excess fat." "With improved breeding and feeding practices, packaging techniques, and marketing methods, beef sales will rise again."



Bob DeYoung

