

# Grass-fed Greatness

Established in 1999, Texas-based Burgundy Pasture Beef was a pioneer in the grass-fed business.

by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

In the 1990s, grass-fed beef was not yet a buzzword. However, Jon Taggart; his wife, Wendy; and their young family saw a future in wholesome, flavorful food. In 1999, Taggart established a meat business at Grandview, Texas, offering 100% grass-fed beef — along with grass-fed lamb, pasture pork, free-range chicken, eggs and raw-milk cheese. Located just 35 minutes south of downtown Fort Worth and 50 minutes southwest of downtown Dallas, Burgundy Pasture Beef had the opportunity to serve a metropolitan area.

“We started as a pioneer with grass-fed beef; we offered it before Whole Foods and Kroger,” says Taggart.

Today — 17 years later — their business is going strong. It still includes their Burgundy Bucherie (French for butcher market) at Grandview, along with a retail store that includes a meat market and grill in Fort Worth. Home delivery and online sales are also major components of the business.

Looking back on the business they’ve built, Taggart is frank, saying, “It’s not an insurmountable business to get into, but it’s pretty close.”

So how did they do it?

## Quality, quality, quality

Taggart credits their success foremost to superior product. He notes, “You have the opportunity to sell a product one time, and if it’s not a good experience for the customer, they won’t try it again.”

He points out, “From genetics all the way through to processing — it all matters.” As an example, he says if cattle are stressed prior to processing, the carcass can result in an undesirable dark cutter. “[With poor handling] that last day, you can screw up two years of work,” Taggart says.

Regarding genetics, Taggart offers solely Angus genetics that are 100% grass-fed. He works with two to three producers



during the year who supply the beef his business needs. Taggart says, “I like straight-bred Angus because of their marbling, tenderness and consistent end product.” He also compliments the breed for disposition.

More specifically, he selects cattle that are moderate-framed, and he prefers heifers. He says, “They don’t get as big and finish quicker. I also think they marble sooner.”

Taggart knows just when a grass-fed animal is ready to process. He explains, “I want the brisket full and fullness over the ribs and hip.” He says fat cover is important for the dry-aging process because “it protects the carcass.”

## Processing protocols

Slaughter of animals is outsourced; carcasses are then brought to the Taggarts’ processing facility in Grandview, which they built in 2004. Taggart says, “We’ve processed cattle every week for 11 years. That’s a challenge, but we’re proud we’ve done it. It’s important to offer customers a constant supply.”

Taggart has found his customers prefer dry-aged beef, but the traditional 21 days for the grass-fed carcass seemed to produce beef with a gamey taste. He experimented with various

lengths of aging and found 14 days to be ideal.

To ensure quality to customers, the Taggarts take a piece of strip loin off every carcass after aging to cook and sample. Taggart says only on a rare occasion is a carcass identified as too tough. Those carcasses are used for ground beef, hot dogs or stew meat.

Taggart has learned that packaging details are important to the business’s success. All products are vacuum-packed, and, he says, “Presentation is extremely important.” Additionally, neatness counts. He notes that customers don’t want to see blood on the meat label.

For marketing — especially online where product is priced per piece [i.e., per steak instead of per ounce (oz.)] — consistency is critical. “This can be challenging because a 12-ounce strip steak can vary in thickness and size, but customers expect the same every time. So a lot of planning must go into packaging consistently.”

Even though their facility is for cutting and packaging only, a USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspector visits daily.

“They are my unpaid sanitation supervisor,” says Taggart.

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Taggart notes that he has to deal with “lots of regulations and recordkeeping,” but he notes that USDA inspection is important because it is required to be eligible to ship product across state lines.

### Delivery opened doors

From the beginning, the cornerstone of Burgundy Pasture Beef was home delivery.

“We home delivered, which made it easy for customers,” says Taggart. “It was a lot of work and expensive, but it worked.”

Today, Taggart continues to offer home delivery in the Dallas-Fort Worth area on Saturdays, but he also ships a lot of beef from online sales.

“The Internet is the greatest thing that has happened for small businesses. Shipping is the way to go,” he adds.

In spring 2014, the Taggarts added a second location outside of Grandview, opening a retail store in Fort Worth. Called Burgundy’s Local, the grass-fed meat market includes retail coolers offering a chilled and frozen selection of their grass-fed products, as well as a grill that serves grass-fed hamburgers and frankfurters on weekends.

Of the Fort Worth retail store, Taggart reports, “It was a home run that way

## More about Burgundy Pasture Beef

- ▶ Currently, Burgundy Pasture Beef charges \$7.99 per pound (lb.) for ground beef and \$7 per dozen for free-range eggs.
- ▶ They offer ranch tours twice a year and charge a fee to attendees. Jon Taggart says when customers “see chickens out on the range, that makes a [positive] impression.”
- ▶ Burgundy Pasture Beef has expanded their product offering and sales potential by offering a line of grass-fed hotdogs, franks and beef jerky. These items are cooked, packaged and labeled via a contract with another business.
- ▶ Currently, Burgundy Pasture Beef supplies product to a few restaurants, and requires those restaurants to list Burgundy Pasture Beef as the supplier on the menu. However, Taggart does not seek to do a lot of restaurant business because, he says, they often “cherry pick” the products they want.
- ▶ Of the grill in their Fort Worth retail store, Taggart admits it adds to overhead, requiring more employees and work, but he says the customer traffic it brings in helps drive sales of retail product.

exceeded my expectations.” He credits their home delivery for helping their retail success. Taggart explains, “Because we home delivered for so long, I knew the demographics of my customers. That information helped guide our retail location selection.”

Taggart offers both frozen and chilled products, with most retail items chilled. Early on he says he was told out loud and often, “You can’t sell frozen product.” To this Taggart says, “I’ve learned that wasn’t true.” He stocks his retail coolers three times per week and says, “If you’re not stocked, customers won’t come back.”

Lastly, Taggart emphasizes that his

business is very much about building relationships with customers and helping them learn about the food they are eating.

“We sell a story, and grass-fed, local and sustainable are all chapters,” Taggart says. He also emphasizes that he does not slam conventional beef. Instead, he views all beef marketers as offering choices to customers.

Most importantly, he notes, “We have a lot of people eating beef who otherwise wouldn’t be if it weren’t for their relationship with our business.”



**Editor’s Note:** *Kindra Gordon is a cattlemoan and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.*