

# One Cut at a Time

Growing value for producers, consumers and everyone in between.

by Jennifer Kiko

Congress isn't alone when it comes to promoting an economic stimulus package. Keep an eye on the meatcase at your local retailer this summer. Thanks to a 2008 initiative from the checkoff-funded Beef Innovations Group (BIG), consumers will soon see new beef cuts that are easily prepared and easy on the wallet.

Beef remains the most popular protein among American consumers, though buying trends change constantly. That's where BIG comes in. The team is composed of meat and food scientists, operators, marketers, chefs and culinary professionals. They know consumers. They know beef. They pair

new ideas and products with dedication to increasing value.

During the next few months, BIG will unveil new cuts fabricated from the chuck roll. Initially, *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Denver cut, Sierra steak, chuck eye steak, boneless country-style short ribs and beef chuck short ribs will be available at Meijer Inc. stores in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area. Other retailers and foodservice entities will follow.

Mark Gwin, CAB value-added products research and development manager, is on the BIG team.

"As a representative of CAB, I can work with retail and foodservice groups to initiate business with our licensees," he says. "We can identify innovators in the industry who will eagerly pursue new ways to satisfy customers."

The new products from the chuck are succulent cuts that add significant value to muscles currently used for roasts and ground chuck, Gwin says. But high-quality beef is essential.

"These cuts — particularly the Denver cut — have increased levels of collagen," he notes. "The collagen gelatinizes during cooking

if beef is low-A maturity, as in CAB cattle."

The project has been met with enthusiasm throughout the industry, Gwin says. "Retailers are excited to offer new, attractively priced cuts with higher margins. Packers can offer value cuts to increase their margins."

Cattle-Fax estimated the first group of value cuts from the chuck — flat iron, ranch cut and petite

tender — added \$50-\$60 per head. It stands to reason the next wave of products will add more value still for producers. They'll also be popular with consumers looking to conserve food dollars without sacrificing taste.

## Dining in

In 2006, *Food Technology* magazine reported the economic slowdown was causing more consumers to cook at home. It also reported 77% of consumers ate dinner "in" at least five days a week.

Forget cake — let them eat beef!

Recent beef industry focus groups and a national online survey confirmed, "consumers are open to adding new beef dishes to their cooking repertoires, but they want recipes that fit their time-pressured, budget-conscious lifestyles."

Bring out the new chuck cuts and we're halfway to the goal, says Sarah Donohoe, CAB home economist. What consumers need next is know-how.

"There are many cuts of beef available, some with multiple names. Not all cuts are good on the grill or in the skillet. Consumers have a fear of messing up supper, which equals wasted time and money," Donohoe says.

## Educating consumers

One of the most common questions Donohoe gets at public events is, "How do I season the beef?"

Her response is simply another question: "What's in your cupboard?"

Because of the high degree of marbling in CAB product, beef maintains its great flavor in a variety of cooking applications. A little seasoning goes a long way — something Donohoe recites faithfully to consumers.

CAB's marketing team recently hosted a make-and-take your own spice mix event at the Great Northeast Home Show in Albany, N.Y. The activity was so successful it was repeated a week later at the Mid-Atlantic Home Show in Norfolk, Va. Visitors to the brand's booth had the opportunity to create one of several spice rub recipes using seasonings found in most kitchens.

"The response was amazing," says Deanna Walenciak, CAB marketing director. "Consumers waited in line for the chance to create a spice rub. It was



► Point-of-sale materials were developed to engage and educate consumers.

## Sarah's kitchen tips

- ▶ Think beyond reheating leftovers. Build sandwich creations, reinvent pasta, salads, soups — transform leftovers into fabulous meals.
- ▶ Themed meals are fun for the family. Research fun facts and pair table settings with a theme.
- ▶ Experiment with seasonings. Add dried herbs at the beginning of the cooking process or fresh herbs at the end.
- ▶ Use pantry staples. Create new flavor combinations according to your tastes.

an excellent opportunity for us to promote the brand, explain how simple beef preparation can be and really relate to consumers' dinner dilemmas.”

### Spice it up

Donohoe's tried-and-true suggestions for spicing up beef for dinner: salt and pepper. “That's where I usually start when I'm cooking or offering tips to others. When you start with high-quality beef, salt and pepper is all you need. Use seasonings on the accompaniments — pasta, potatoes, vegetables — the beef stands on its own.”

She does encourage consumers to experiment. Personal favorites include thyme, rosemary and parsley. If rosemary is too strong for your taste buds, Donohoe recommends a substitute — oregano, perhaps. She also combines cilantro, lime and cayenne, or thyme and tarragon.

“Seasonings are a matter of personal preference,” she says. “From a pantry perspective, I always have on hand kosher salt, peppercorns for freshly-ground pepper, thyme, basil, cayenne, ginger and cumin.”

Food dollars aren't the only scarce item in consumer budgets. Time is of the essence for most home cooks. That's why Donohoe says if grilling isn't an option, try pan-roasting.

“You can use a variety of [often more economical] cuts when pan-roasting,” she says. “Simply brown beef in a skillet and finish in the oven. Pan-roasting is a great way to cook once and have enough for a few extra meals — known as planned-overs.”



▶ Sarah Donohoe, CAB home economist, says flavorful CAB cuts need only salt and pepper.

### Consumer spotlight

CAB continues to address the needs of consumers through a series of downloadable videos featuring corporate chef Scott Popovic.

Available on the brand's web site, [www.certifiedangusbeef.com](http://www.certifiedangusbeef.com), consumers can enjoy a “private” cooking demonstration on braising, grilling, pan-roasting, roasting and sautéing. More topics will follow.

The video clips have also been posted on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), ensuring greater exposure to beef-savvy consumers.

While producers strive to grow the very best cattle under the most economical circumstances, consumers will continue their quest for perfection. Monday's meal may feature chuck eye roast with chipotle pepper sauce.

Friday's splurge may be a CAB Prime filet, simply dressed in salt and pepper.

No matter. Thanks to industry-wide efforts to please palates, the possibilities are endless. And that's the way consumers like it.



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