



## *What's on your customer's grill?*

No doubt about it, the grill is hot. From the smallest hibachi to the titanic gas rotisserie models, Americans love to fire them up. Summertime sizzles, of course, but some folks even cook steaks under the stars in December. Flashlight and coat are optional, but flavor is a must.

Any time of year, beef is king of the grill, with burgers and steaks dominating demand. Maybe it's because of the nutrient density; the top source for protein, vitamin B12 and zinc, beef is also the third leading source of iron—and a whole lot easier to grill than cereal and grains.

As producers, you know how good beef is for you. But you still like to hear people say good things about it, from the aroma to the taste, nutrition and satisfaction. Maybe you're an expert in preparing home-grown cuts for guests, but the people who increased their demand for beef 25% over the last six years probably have less skill.

Grilling is a casual task often reserved for men, the only time some of them cook unless you count reheating coffee in a microwave. A few are super patio chefs who know how to seal in the flavor with a hot fire and manage to achieve any desired degree of doneness with almost any quality beef. The rest fall short of ideal skills, but all want ideal results.

We used to put more effort into “educating” consumers. It didn't work so well, because those who cared enough or had time to learn already knew. The beef industry had to change to reach most consumers. That meant producing beef that is harder to mess up, even when the cook gets distracted by conversation or a ball game.

A little education does work. Category-guided meat cases now sort offerings into those suitable for the backyard venue and those requiring more time-consuming methods. That keeps the least knowledgeable consumer from buying a package of round steaks to slap on the grill. But there is still a wide range of quality, especially among retailers who think their customers only care about price.

In today's economy, any beef represents more investment than less flavorful protein alternatives. But the beef industry is not well served by putting inconsistent, low quality grade cuts up against pork and poultry in a price war. The way to gain another 25% in consumer demand over the next six years is to deliver a great eating experience as often as possible, so people don't waste their money and disappoint guests on that special occasion.

The cattle markets know this. It is why value-based pricing offers a premium for beef with at least a small degree of marbling—the intramuscular flecks of fat in a beef cut that makes it taste good. To a large extent, the more marbling a steak has, the more goof proof it is on the grill, too.

When only poorly marbled cuts are available, the average Joe tries to grill beef once in a while, but the kitchen boss will be afraid to rely on him and his average beef for the big moments. If you've had many backyard hamburgers of unknown quality cooked by nonprofessional chefs, you know steaks aren't the only beef items that can use a little more moisture sealed in by higher marbling.

When we can help turn Joe into somebody whose family and friends consider an ideal chef, we win more consumer demand for beef. That's why the cattle you produce should finish and yield beef that delivers satisfaction as often as possible, even for the charcoal challenged. Get fired up to produce above-average beef that works for the average customer. That's where the money is today, and where demand tomorrow will add more profit to your business.

Next time in *Black Ink*, we'll consider skeptics. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail [steve@certifiedangusbeef.com](mailto:steve@certifiedangusbeef.com).

END