

# Dairy beef makes U.S. market go round

By JOHN VOGEL

**T**ODAY'S juicy, marbled Prime and Choice cuts may come from dairy beef — not beef-breed beef. That's the surprising word from Gary Smith, Colorado State animal scientist.

"While many believe dairy beef is processed and sold only as ground beef, nearly 50% of today's dairy beef is actually sold as whole-muscle cuts," he reports. According to the Beef Checkoff Program's 2005 National Beef Quality Audit, 56.2% of cattle slaughtered have black hides.

A good portion of that black may be due to Holstein genetics. About 8% of those animals — one out of every 12 head slaughtered — are Holsteins. Since Jersey, Brown Swiss and other dairy breeds are included in the audit tallies, dairy beef's impact could be as high as one out of every eight head.

"Dairy beef makes up a considerable amount of the U.S. beef supply. It has a significant economic impact on the beef industry," adds Smith.

## Why it's better beef

The audit found that Holstein carcasses rarely made Yield Grade 4 or Yield Grade 5. It also found that too many beef carcasses fell into those categories.

The audit compared dairy beef and beef from native beef breeds. Here's how they stacked up:

- About 2% of beef from native breeds graded Prime, and 17% graded Choice.

- About 15% of dairy beef graded Prime, and 25% graded Choice.

- Dairy beef does a better job at meeting consumers' expectations for

## Key Points

- Audit discovered that dairy-beef "cuts" yield better grades.
- One out of every eight beef carcasses may have dairy genetics.
- That great steak just might be from a Holstein beef.

tenderness, flavor and juiciness, contends Smith.

- Holstein and Brown Swiss steers

produce carcasses with high-quality grades, with the desirable yield grades and at desired weights.

- Jersey and Guernsey steers produce carcasses with exceptionally high-quality grades, with average yield grades at very light weights.

- Carcasses for all four of these dairy breeds are thinly muscled.

- Holstein and Brown Swiss have lower muscle-to-bone ratios compared to British and European breeds; that's not true for Jersey and Guernsey cattle.

Holsteins produce more consistent beef due to the breed's narrow genetic base, contends Smith. Overall, 75% of active sires in the Holstein breed have one, or both, of two famous bulls in the last three generations of their pedigree. In addition, 90% of active Holstein bulls are descendants of five bulls.

"Without dairy beef, the industry would have a difficult time supplying enough Prime and Choice cuts to restaurants and other food-service operations," concludes Smith.



## Sexed semen brings changes

**E**XPERTS in the artificial insemination industry expect sexed-semen technology to have its greatest impact on the beef industry — ultimately producing more steers. But the demand for it is growing fastest, in the short term, within the dairy industry where bull calves are seen as a waste of genetic material.

As the technology takes hold, fewer dairy-beef calves may be headed for feedlots. That might impact the supply of Prime and Choice cuts, theorizes animal scientist Gary Smith.

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