Best techniques for dry aging studied by USMEF, OSU team

A study that analyzes differing techniques for dry-aging U.S. beef destined for international markets has been completed for the U.S. Meat Export Federation by researchers at Oklahoma State University’s Department of Animal Science.

Funding for the collaborative research effort was provided by the Oklahoma Beef Council.

“This is an outstanding example of applying research in the marketplace where it can benefit producers in Oklahoma and around the country,” says Brett Morris, chairman of the Oklahoma Beef Council board of directors. “The opportunity to expand markets for U.S. beef by offering dry-aged product is an excellent use of producers’ checkoff dollars.”

OSU researchers, headed by former OSU professor Brad Morgan, analyzed four different techniques for dry-aging beef:

■ Wet aging in the U.S. followed by exporting to the international market and dry aging in-market.

■ Wet aging in the U.S. followed by dry aging in the U.S., freezing in the U.S. and exporting.

■ Freezing in the U.S. followed by export and dry aging in the international market.

■ Wet aging in the U.S. followed by dry aging in the U.S. and wet aging while in transit to the international market.

The study measured the product based on expected eating quality, dry-aging yield, cut yield, cooking loss, moisture and fat content.

“This is very useful research to share with our export partners around the globe,” says Paul Clayton, USMEF’s senior vice president of export services. “As demand for dry-aged beef increases, the work that OSU researchers have done will help ensure that the quality of the product can be maintained during shipment across long distances, and losses from the dry-aging process will be minimized.”

Oklahoma State University was a logical partner with USMEF on the project. OSU faculty members have worked extensively on industry issues in Asia, and they have reported on receiving numerous inquiries regarding dry aging.

“The growing popularity of dry aging has generated a lot of interest and a lot of questions,” Clayton says. “Since there are varying techniques to accomplish dry aging, this research can provide guidance based on the end result desired, whether it be cut yield, cooking loss, product moisture or other factors important for maintaining a desirable eating experience.”

Interest strong in Asia

“Dry aging has definitely created a high-end niche in the food-service market in Korea,” says Jihae Yang, USMEF-South Korea director. “Top hotels and some steakhouses in the trendiest areas of Seoul have been major players with dry aging. It’s significant when we see them building their own dry-aging facility, showing their determination to sell dry-aged beef.”

But dry aging is not limited to prime grade product.

“I think Choice or high Choice grade beef also can make for a great-tasting but affordable dry-aged steak,” she says. “And it’s very encouraging to watch dry-aged U.S. beef being talked about by important food industry influencers like chefs, critics, journalists and bloggers.”

Dry aging also is catching on in Singapore, which is the culinary trendsetter for Southeast Asia, according to Sabrina Yin, USMEF-ASEAN director.

“Certain importers see the potential of dry aging, and they have to keep introducing new products into the market so that food-service operators can have something new to feature,” she says. “Singapore is a very cosmopolitan country with many well-known international chefs. The demand for dry-aged beef is there.”

Additional E. coli testing gains backing

Beef Products Inc. will begin testing for an additional six strains of pathogenic E. coli — commonly referred to as non-O157 Shiga-toxin-producing E. coli. The additional testing will determine whether current interventions and safety process control measures are working against these toxins. According to J.O. “Bo” Reagan, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association senior vice president of Research, Education and Innovation, you can’t test your way to a safe product, but you can test to ensure the process controls in place are working.

USDA announces new raw meat label

The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service is proposing a new rule to establish common, easy-to-understand names for raw meat and poultry products that include injected, marinated, or have otherwise incorporated added solutions that may not be visible to the consumer. FSIS has determined that some labels do not clearly identify if a solution has been added to a raw product to enhance flavor or texture. As a result, consumers may be purchasing raw meat and poultry products with higher sodium content than they realize.

Beef convenience items in development

Convenience foods are projected to be a $47.5 billion niche market in 2012, and the beef checkoff is trying to capture more of the international market for these products and help sustain the pace of U.S. beef export growth. Representatives of the checkoff’s Beef Innovations Group met with foreign marketing program representatives to taste and learn how to prepare new beef convenience foods, ranging from appetizers to roasts. The goal was to determine where there may be expansion opportunities for U.S. beef products in some of these key markets.

National Beef Quality Audit seeking producer input

The 2011 checkoff-funded National Beef Quality Audit, led by scientists from Colorado State University and Texas A&M University, is designed to collect and analyze information from cooler audits in the packing sector, face-to-face interviews with beef supply chain partners, and for the first time, cattle producers. According to Tom Field, who manages the BQA program for the beef checkoff, producer input is integral to benchmarking what producers believe quality to be and how they affect the quality of the product in the end.

Key Points

■ USMEF and Oklahoma State finish report on dry-aging options in OSU beef study.

■ Study measured eating quality, dry-aging yield, cut yield, cooking loss, moisture, fat.

■ OSU information will be helpful in working with export partners around the world.

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