

## Direct Marketing of Beef Side and Quarters

By: John Hamm

Probably the most profitable and effective way for small and very small beef producers to market their beef steers is selling them directly to consumers as sides and quarters. I will try to explain in this article how to do this as simply and efficiently as possible.

### Why sell sides and quarters?

Many small producers, particularly those of specialty breeds such as Belted Galloway have limited markets open to them. Sales buyers, livestock markets and large packing houses are not familiar with Belted Galloways and the prices producers receive are heavily discounted. Most small producers also do not have the time, resources, or experience to make money or successfully sell at farmer's markets or wholesale. These types of sales are difficult even for professionals.

Selling sides and quarters is a simple and effective sales method to start with. It's something that can work for almost anybody. Most small producers already get some of their livestock processed for their own use. If you do not process your own, why not? Are you raising pets or meat? For your credibility it is important you use your own product. That way you know that it is indeed excellent product and you can honestly answer questions about your product.

### What do I have to sell?

Determine early what you have to sell. Maybe it will just be the other ½ of your son/daughter's show steer. Or maybe you will produce 5 steers this year, that would be 10 halves or 20 quarters. That gives you an idea how many customers you need.

### Is my product the best?

Always make sure you are giving your customers the best product in the market place. That is why I changed to raising Belted Galloway and Belted Cross steers in 1998. All the beef we sell meet specific guidelines. All are under 30 months of age and are grain (corn) fed at least 100 days. On Belted steers we want a 600-700 lb carcass that will grade low choice or high select. While we want marbling we do not want excessive amounts of fat. Grain fed is important to us. Our customers expect bright white fat and bright red meat with relatively large steaks. We breed our Belted Galloway Steers to routinely have 12" Rib Eyes. This seems to be ideal size for our customers.

None of my producers or our farm use implants or sub therapeutic antibiotics. We try to raise our beef as naturally as possible while maintaining herd health. Our customers greatly appreciate this.

Never, ever market your beef if it is not properly finished. The meat will appear dark and stringy, and will be tough. Also never, ever try to sell cull cows or bulls to people and represent them as choice steers. Not only will you lose a customer but after being swindled and sold inferior meat it is unlikely they will ever buy quarters or sides again.

## Who will process my beef?

Getting the right processor is very important. I would recommend you start with your usual processor. He knows you and should value your business. For selling your product you will need to use a state or federally licensed plant. Your beef will need to be slaughtered under inspection and have the marks of inspection on each package. Look for a processor who is a member of AAMP or your state meat processors association. Meet with your processor ahead of time. Make sure you schedule your processing with him and know your fees up front. Also make sure he can offer you the services you need, such as patties, boxing etc.

We have all our beef boxed in new nice boxes when our customers pick it up. They greatly appreciate it. Also make sure your processor will hold the meat until your customers can pick it up. I usually recommend that the producer have his customers pick up their meat at the processor and pay the processing fees.

Do not let yourself be hypnotized by fancy requests and elaborate cuts or other extravagances from your customers. Contrary to some self appointed experts, we have had tremendous success with packaging the meat in heavy freezer paper with a nice tight package. The beef will travel a lot better than if vacuum packaged and there will not be any leaking packages. Also, light causes meat in vacuum packages to discolor quickly. Nicely wrapped, properly marked packages work great for us.

We have our best success sticking to standard cuts. Standard cuts will insure the greatest yield out of your carcasses and the most usable meat for your customers. Our standard cutting instructions and approximately what we get out of each ½ of beef are as follows:

### 370# Choice/Select ½ Beef

- 2 – Rump roast – 3# packages
- 3 – Sirloin tip roast – 3# packages
- 6 – 1” porterhouse – 2 per package
- 8 – 1” T-bones – 2 per package
- 15 – 1” rib steak – 2 per package
- 6 -1” sirloin steak – 1 per package
- 8 – ¾ “ round steak – 1 per package
- 10 – Soup bones – 2# package
- 12# short ribs – 2# package
- 3 – Arm roast – 3# package
- 10 – Chuck roast – 3# package
- 81# ground beef – 1# packages

If the customer does not use soup bones or short ribs we process them into ground beef. We also always ask customers if they want the heart, tongue, liver or oxtail. If the customer does not want them we keep them. Unusable items in the freezer are a turn off to customers, so we don't give them product they won't use. We discourage customers from ordering beef tenderloins, new york strips or whole ribeyes. These cuts greatly cut down your yield and packages returned to the customer. Stick to basic cuts.

### Who will I sell my beef to?

This is a question that many producers struggle with. The answers are simpler than you think. First, make sure your beef by the road look nice and that you have a simple sign with “Beef for sale”. That will attract people to your door. Have your phone number on it and make sure you can answer price and availability questions when potential customers ask. Friends and relatives also are good potential customers. They are good candidates to sample your product too. But remember, you are in a business. Do not sell your meat at discounted prices to so many friends and relatives that you lose money. Avoid this pitfall. I only give discounts to my parents, no one else, this avoids confusion.

Many of my producers have very good luck selling sides and quarters at their work places. Teachers and factory workers seem to be especially good at selling to their co workers. Many times folks you go to church with are also good customers. Many of my original customers were folks from my church. Some of our producers who are business owners and professional people also sell their beef to their employees and clients. The employees and clients seem to be very loyal customers and are very often repeat customers as well. Several of my producers enjoy frequenting public houses and are well known for the quality of their meat animals and people seek them out. Sell to the people you know and you will be successful. Follow up with your sales with a call to make sure they are satisfied.

Co-workers, friends, relatives and acquaintances are all good potential customers. You will find that if satisfied they will spread the word and bring you new customers. I have also found several things that don't work. Ads in local papers usually only attract cheap bargain hounds and are seldom effective. Also, trying to sell to the health obsessed rarely works. While your grass fed organic or other specialty meat may be the rage today, they will move on to ostrich or kelp or whatever else is the next fad. They are more interested in being trendy than anything else. They are not long term customers. We have good luck selling to families and regular folks. They are great repeat customers and a pleasure to do business with.

### What will I charge for my beef?

There are several ways to charge for your beef, but I would recommend you keep it simple. The simplest way is to sell it rail weight. Hanging weight is an absolute, known weight that everyone can agree on. So that part is simple. How do you arrive at a price?

Most of the producers I work with are charging \$2/lb, plus processing to their customers. We are selling beef sides and quarters at our plant for \$2.19/lb and this includes the processing. At this time we are buying beef from local producers for \$1.50/lb hanging weight. Wisconsin Packers are paying up to \$1.50/lb hanging weight or .90+ on live weight for top beef steers. Some of our producers sell to their customers for between \$1.40 and \$2.50. The choice is theirs.

You can ask your local locker the going beef market prices, or check the internet or your farm papers. We like to sell our beef at a price we make a nice return, but the

customer still saves money versus buying the cuts all individually at retail. Marketing your own beef keeps you in control, and lets you receive a premium price.

### Closing the deal

Make sure you and your customer agree on price upfront. Make sure they also understand what they will have to pay for processing. Then we pretty much recommend you collect C.O.D. Collect as soon as the beef are hanging at the locker. We accept checks from customers, people we know or someone referred by a customer. If we don't know them we may require them to pay a deposit. Some customers may want to pay with credit card. Some locker plants can help you with that.

Some locker plants will even collect your money for you from your customer. Make sure to make the arrangements ahead of time. You should have a simple credit policy also. I would recommend it be if a customer stiffs you or gives you a NSF check, you are done doing business with them. You don't have to be unkind. Just tell them, whenever they ask, all your beef is already spoken for.

We also guarantee all our beef. I have been selling 50-100 head per year for the last 30 years and have only replaced about 4 head. One of these beef, although looking perfect, was very tough. The other beef were fine but I sold them to people I shouldn't have. These people were expecting chemically tenderized and mechanically formed uniform product, not farm raised beef! I should have done a better job of informing them of what they would get. I was not selling what they wanted. Guaranteeing your product will give you credibility with your customer and help develop strong customer loyalty.

### **LET'S SELL SOME BEEF!**

This article should give you the basic info to get you going on marketing your beef. This is also a good opportunity to have fun and make friends. Be proud of your product and promote it. Show off your farm and your animals with pride. Share and sample your beef with friends and folks. Find a meat processor who shares your passion for excellence and customer satisfaction. If you need any more help or have any questions you can email me at [john@wisconsinrivermeats.com](mailto:john@wisconsinrivermeats.com) or call your local University Extension. **Now go sell some beef!**

John D. Hamm