



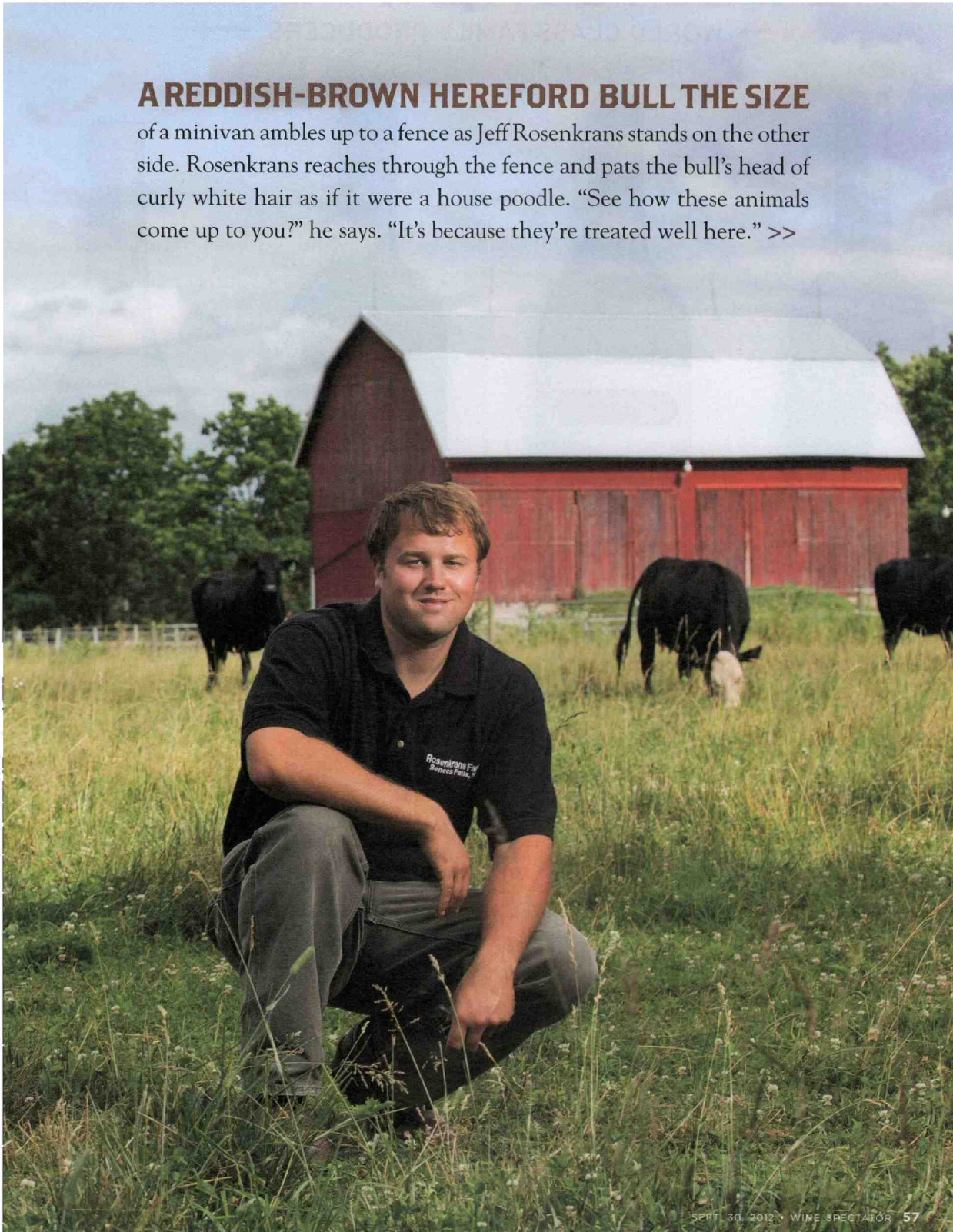
BEEF PRIMER

The inside story on where it comes from and what makes the best
BY SAM GUGINO

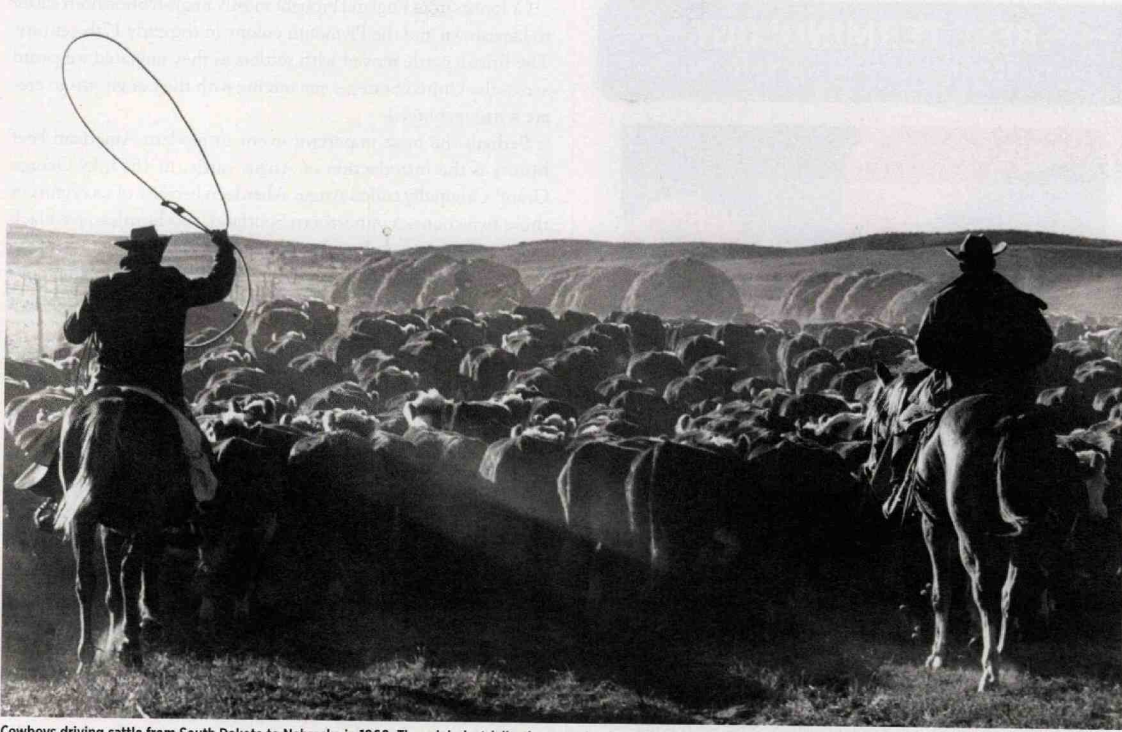
Jeff Rosenkrans of Rosenkrans Farm in Seneca Falls, N.Y., is one of a growing number of small farmers taking great care to produce premium beef.

A REDDISH-BROWN HEREFORD BULL THE SIZE

of a minivan ambles up to a fence as Jeff Rosenkrans stands on the other side. Rosenkrans reaches through the fence and pats the bull's head of curly white hair as if it were a house poodle. "See how these animals come up to you?" he says. "It's because they're treated well here." >>



SEPT. 30, 2012 • WINE SPECTATOR 57



Cowboys driving cattle from South Dakota to Nebraska in 1960. Though industrialization now dominates beef farming, there are still some traditional ranchers in operation.

For Rosenkrans, who runs a small cattle farm in New York's Finger Lakes region, treating animals well means feeding them exclusively on grass (mostly alfalfa), clover and silage (stored grass) that he grows himself. It also means giving them room to move and act the way cows are supposed to, and transporting them to the slaughterhouse gently. "I detest cattle prods," he says.

His farm in Seneca Falls raised 100 head of cattle for slaughter last year and expects to do 120 head this year, mostly Angus and an Angus-Hereford crossbreed called Baldy (their coats are entirely black except for the white on their foreheads). Rosenkrans' cattle represent an infinitesimal portion of the 26.4 billion pounds of beef turned out in this country in 2010.

While Americans are now eating beef less frequently, when they do eat it, it tends to be of higher quality than it might have been just a few decades ago. Often that beef is consumed in restaurants, including steak houses. In fact, the number of steak houses in the country has recently exploded.

"More people want to eat beef now than they did 40 years ago, and they want higher quality," says Alan Stillman, an owner of Fourth Wall Restaurants, which includes Smith & Wollensky, one of New York's highest-grossing steak houses. "When we started, in 1977, there were four high-end steak houses in New York. Now,

I think there are 68 or 78. And that's just New York."

In addition to being better in quality, the type of beef offered today is more varied than ever; restaurant-goers are inundated with choices such as grass-fed, corn-fed, Angus, Wagyu, prime, choice, certified Black Angus and more. How does one know what to choose? The key is in understanding some of the categories that beef may be broken down into, including breed, feed, processing and grading.

BREED

DESPITE THE ICONIC IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN

cowboy, cattle are not native to the Americas. They've been domesticated in Europe and Asia since the Stone Age, but it wasn't until 1493 that Christopher Columbus introduced them to the New World. Later, descendants of these cattle were taken to Mexico by Hernán Cortés, and some found their way into what became the United States. These cattle, from the Andalusian Mountains of Spain, were the antecedents of the legendary Texas Longhorn.

"MORE PEOPLE WANT TO EAT BEEF NOW THAN THEY DID 40 YEARS AGO, AND THEY WANT HIGHER QUALITY."— RESTAURATEUR ALAN STILLMAN

PREVIOUS SPREAD: MATT WITTMER; THIS PAGE: GREY VILLETTE/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

— BEEF TERMINOLOGY —

Important terms to know when buying beef



Not long ago you simply asked for a steak; now you get a pedigree.

GRASS-FINISHED. Though all cattle feed on grass for a certain portion of their lives, grass-finished, or grass-fed, cattle graze on pasture for their entire lives. Grass-finished cattle are usually but not always hormone- or antibiotic-free. The beef tends to be leaner than grain-fed beef because the cattle are not fattened the way they are in feedlots. Thus, their meat can be somewhat less juicy and chewier than that of grain-finished cattle. For this reason, grass-finished beef is typically cooked for less time.

GRAIN-FINISHED. These cattle spend the final portion of their lives (usually four to six months) in feedlots eating grain. The type of grain is mostly corn, which is why some restaurants call this meat "corn-fed," but there's also wheat, barley and soybeans. Feedlot cattle are typically given growth hormones to speed up weight gain. They are also given antibiotics to prevent sickness that primarily results from the change in diet and also, to a lesser extent, stress-related ailments. Because this type of beef has more fat within its muscles (also known as marbling), it is typically juicier than grass-fed beef, with a richer mouthfeel.

NATURALLY RAISED. This type of cattle never receives antibiotics or growth hormones, although the animals can be given vitamin and mineral supplements. They can be either grain-finished or grass-finished. Naturally raised cattle must be certified as such by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC. All feed, whether grain or grass, consumed by this type of cattle must be entirely organically grown. The animals can never receive antibiotics or growth hormones, although they can be given vitamin and mineral supplements. Certified organic cattle must be certified by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

CERTIFIED HUMANE. This certification is given by the Humane Farm Animal Care, a national nonprofit charity based in Virginia. The criteria are much broader and more detailed than that of either Naturally Raised or Certified Organic, and involve living conditions, handling, health maintenance and feed (although organic feed is not a requirement). Standards for certification do not supersede federal or state laws.

Colonists from England brought mostly English Shorthorn cattle to Jamestown and the Plymouth colony in the early 17th century. The British cattle moved with settlers as they migrated westward across the United States, some mixing with the Longhorns to create a stronger breed.

Perhaps the most important event in modern American beef history is the introduction of Angus cattle, in 1873, by George Grant. Originally called Angus Aberdeen because of its origins in those two counties of northern Scotland, this hornless, jet-black steer is the dominant breed in the United States today. There are fewer numbers of Hereford and Shorthorn, and even smaller populations of other breeds such as Charolais, Limousin, Maine-Anjou and Salers.

As with a certified AOC wine, beef certification doesn't guarantee quality, nor does terminology such as "rancher's reserve," "butcher's prime" or "market choice." These are all supermarket terms for beef and have no direct link to quality.

Heritage cattle breeds, which represent a very small segment of the market, have achieved some recent popularity, although they are often endangered or obscure, or have a trait that precludes them from mass production. The Scottish Highland and the Belted Galloway, for example, are smaller animals, so portions of their meat would be too small for restaurant use. Still, they represent another option in the beef market. "They are wonderful because they are separate and unique," says R. John Dawes, an Angus breeder and co-author of *Breeds of Cattle* (TRS Publishing). "Both marble similarly to Angus."

Another breed that has become popular, especially among well-heeled consumers, is the Wagyu, known more widely as Kobe beef (Kobe is the name of the Japanese prefecture in which this breed was developed). Wagyu beef has extreme tenderness and great flavor, primarily from its intramuscular fat, or marbling. While the fat level of other breeds tops out at a certain age, typically younger than 20 months, Wagyu muscle continues to marble for as long as 29 months. Some full-blooded Wagyu in the United States are slaughtered and sold at phenomenal prices, but most are used for breeding, primarily with Angus because Angus gains weight faster than other breeds, produces more marbling and has more finely fibered meat. (For more on breeds, see "Holy Cows," page 66.)

The progression of beef from cattle grazing in pastures to a pot roast on your stove is a long and involved one, typically taking up to two years and comprising several stages, each of which uniquely influences the final product. Farms that raise cattle represent the largest segment of farming in the country, and the amount of land needed to raise cattle is enormous. Efficient farmers like Rosenkrans, with their own high quality pasture, can raise one cow per acre. But other farmers may need 8 to 10 acres per animal.

And land available for raising cattle is becoming less plentiful. "A lot of pasture has been lost to growing corn for ethanol," notes Darel Sweet of Sweet Ranches in Livermore, Calif. Cattle farming, like any other farming, is also subject to the vagaries of weather. Last year's severe drought in Texas, the nation's largest cattle state, caused a 12 percent drop in the state's herd, a decline of 600,000 cows from a total of 5 million. It was the largest loss of beef in Texas' history.

That drought left the country with its smallest cattle population since the 1950s, according to John Tarpoff, a vice president at

ANDREW WAHL

Alameda, Calif.-based meat producer Niman Ranch. Not surprisingly, beef and veal prices went up, by 9 percent, in 2011, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which projected an additional 4.5 percent to 5.5 percent price increase for 2012.

How do farmers like Rosenkrans and Sweet survive under these adverse conditions? One way is to develop an understanding of genetics. "When we buy bulls, we can select traits that they will pass on, like marbling and growth," Sweet explains. "It has given us reproductive efficiency and has been one of the major changes in the beef industry in the past 30 to 40 years. We're producing as much beef today as we did in the 1970s with far fewer cows."

Rosenkrans takes skin samples from his cows' ears for DNA testing. Information obtained from those samples can determine what percentage of an animal's offspring will be graded choice, as well as the offspring's tendency for docility and whether their birth weight will be high or low. Calves that are too large can cause birthing problems. Docility is important because one ornery cow can negatively affect the whole herd.

FEED

CALVES RANGE FROM 60 TO 100 POUNDS AT

birth and remain on mother's milk for a few months. Then they are pastured for the next six to 10 months. The grass diet is typically supplemented by remnants from area farms. In corn country, for example, cattle are fed what's left over from making ethanol. Sweet's cattle, which reside in wine country, get grape pomace.

All cattle graze on grasses, which are their natural diet, for much of their lives. But more than 90 percent are corn-finished, meaning they spend their final four or six months in feedlots eating primarily corn, but also wheat, soybeans and barley. When retailers and restaurants advertise "corn-fed" beef, this is what they mean. "Grass-fed" beef, or beef from cattle raised solely on grass, currently represents a smaller segment of the market, but it is becoming more popular with chefs and consumers alike due to health, ethical and quality concerns. It tends to be somewhat chewier and can have a direct, mineral flavor.

Corn-fed feedlot cattle produce the kind of beef most Americans have traditionally desired because it has more intramuscular fat, which creates the flavor, juiciness and mouthfeel that is typically associated with good beef. In fact, the USDA gives its highest mark, prime, to beef that has the most intramuscular fat. Prime beef is the kind of beef touted by quality meat markets and higher-end restaurants, and it fetches premium prices from consumers.

Much of the controversy surrounding beef production is based on how feedlots abruptly change the cattle's diet from fresh grass and/or silage to dried grain, which can wreak havoc on the animals' digestion, often making them sick. They are given antibiotics to prevent illness, as well as growth hormones to speed up weight gain, to the extent that they put on as many as 3 pounds a day.

According to George Faison, a partner at Jersey City, N.J.-based beef supplier DeBragga & Spittler, the introduction of growth hormones four decades ago was "the worst thing done in the cattle industry. Hormones help make beef abnormally cheap," he says,

BEEF AGING



Aging of primal cuts is crucial to texture and flavor.

Aging beef requires a commitment of time, space and money, which results in higher costs to the consumer. For this reason, the vast majority of beef in this country is not aged.

Beef sold in grocery stores and supermarkets typically comes from meatpacking plants in what are called "primal cuts," or large sections such as the entire rib (from which store's butchers cut rib steaks), the short loin (strip steaks) or chuck (chuck roasts). These cuts come shrink-wrapped in plastic.

Because supermarkets are not equipped to age these primal cuts, they are portioned within days of their arrival and put in meat cases. You could call this meat "fresh beef" since it is designed for quick consumption. While such beef can taste perfectly fine, it doesn't have the depth of flavor, the buttery texture or the gamy nuances of aged beef.

Meat can be aged in one of two ways.

Wet-aged beef comes in vacuum-sealed plastic bags from the slaughterhouse. In this environment, the meat ages in its own juices; hence the name. Because it is not exposed to air, wet-aged meat does not lose much moisture, and there isn't a need for heavy trimming, as there is with dry-aged meat. Thus, wet-aged beef is considerably cheaper than dry-aged beef, but more expensive than supermarket beef because it ages anywhere from two to six weeks. This aging time allows the meat to intensify in flavor, becoming richer and more beefy. Also unlike supermarket beef, meat chosen for wet-aging is better in quality to begin with, like the higher-end grades of choice used in Certified Angus Beef.

Dry-aged beef, like wet-aged beef, comes from the slaughterhouse in primal cuts. Unlike wet-aged beef, however, these primal cuts are taken out of their wrapping and put in refrigerators at butcher shops or steak houses for three to four weeks, and sometimes longer, at 34° F to 38° F and 50 percent to 60 percent humidity.

While it ages, the meat loses up to 20 percent of its moisture, which concentrates its flavor. In addition, enzymes in the beef break down the muscle fibers, tenderizing the meat. When dry-aging is complete, the exterior of the meat turns a deep mahogany color, with a texture like stiffened leather. That crusty exterior gets trimmed away, reducing the weight by an additional 20 percent to 25 percent, which is another reason why dry-aged meat costs so much.

Dry-aged beef has an aroma that is meatier than that of other beef, with a whiff of game and earth. Its taste is nutty and rich—even fatty, but in a positive way—and its texture is buttery.

MORGAN & OWENS



NY Custom Processing in Bridgewater, N.Y., is known for its attention to detail. The relatively small plant brings in live animals and ships out cuts for consumers and restaurateurs.

but the switch from grass to grain is like a person "going from a vegetarian diet to a dairy diet." Faison works to expand the small farms whose meat he buys, like Rosenkrans'; smaller farms generally operate on what most consumers would consider a more humane model, taking steps such as keeping the cattle on a grass diet for a longer period of time and avoiding growth hormones. They believe that more care at the farm level can result in better meat, and that stressed animals do not taste as good.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the larger cattle industry both counter that hormones and antibiotics pass through the animals before they are slaughtered, and therefore do not adversely affect humans. "Though hormones are widely used in cattle, there are only trace amounts left in the meat," says Robert Hough, a specialist in cattle growth and development and a co-author of *Breeds of Cattle*. "You get more hormones that naturally occur in soybeans."

Sweet, whose cattle get antibiotics and hormones as part of their feedlot regimen, notes that many people are quick to criticize feedlot beef but don't really understand what's involved. "People should stop and think about what it takes to produce a high quality product 365 days a year," he says. "They expect to go to their

supermarket 24/7 and have the beef they want."

Some large beef producers, notably Niman Ranch, indicate on their products that hormones or antibiotics are never given to their cattle. The animals may also be humanely raised, often on small farms. Niman contracts with about 700 small farms, each raising 100 to 2,500 head of cattle.

What separates Niman cattle from grass-fed cattle is that the former are finished on grain in feedlots, like conventional beef. Unlike typical corn-finished cattle, however, Niman cattle are pastured longer, which gives them more time to grow and develop their immune system so they don't need growth hormones or antibiotics. "It's like little kids that get sick a lot," says Niman's Tarpoff. "As they get older, they don't get sick as much." Niman cattle are typically 12 to 14 months old before they're sent to feedlots, compared with most cattle's five to eight months.

Because they aren't given hormones and because grass doesn't fatten cattle as fast as corn or marble their muscles as well, Rosenkrans' cattle gain about half the weight that feedlot cattle gain per day. Therefore, they need more time to develop before they are ready for slaughter, anywhere from 18 to 24 months. Sweet's cattle, on the other hand, are ready in 14 months.

GRASS-FED BEEF CURRENTLY REPRESENTS A SMALLER SEGMENT OF THE MARKET BUT IT IS BECOMING MORE POPULAR WITH CHEFS AND CONSUMERS ALIKE DUE TO HEALTH, ETHICAL AND QUALITY CONCERNS.

MATT WITTMAYER

To get his cows through cold winters, Rosenkrans must feed them silage, grass that has been harvested and wrapped in white plastic tubes. The tubes are attached to each other, making the winter countryside at Rosenkrans Farms look like it is being attacked by giant albino worms. But silage isn't just old grass; when wrapped, it has about 50 percent moisture, which promotes fermentation and retention of proteins, fiber and energy. "It's sweet and rich," Rosenkrans says. "Calves go after it like candy."

PROCESSING

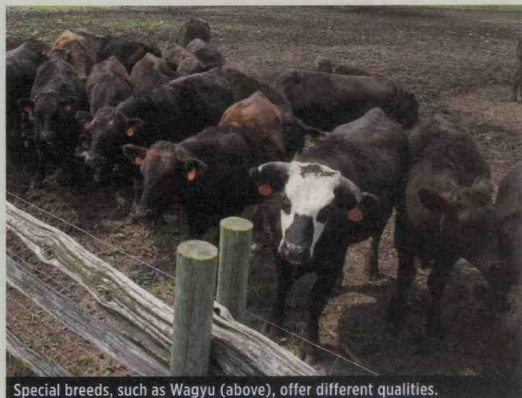
NY CUSTOM PROCESSING, THE BRIDGEWATER, N.Y.-based slaughterhouse that DeBragga & Spitler's Faison uses for his grass-fed beef, handles about 30 animals a day—a tiny amount compared with conventional beef plants that may process as many as 5,000 a day. Faison has to pay a higher fee for the more attentive processing: 40 cents to 45 cents a pound compared with 10 cents a pound at typical beef plants.

Minimizing the stress of the animals in large facilities isn't easy. For Faison and Rosenkrans, however, it's important that their animals are processed with the least amount of stress possible. Faison says, "Meat tastes better from animals that aren't stressed." The cattle are eased onto the truck that will take them to their final destination, and the driver travels slowly to avoid sudden stops. On hot summer days, the cattle are trucked in early, when it's cooler. Niman's facility in Omaha, Neb., processes 1,100 to 1,200 head a day, but the ranches that supply the cattle are all within a 350-mile radius of the plant. The less distance cattle have to travel, the better their disposition. The happier they are when they are harvested, the better the quality of their meat.

Faison has been working with the butchers at NY Custom Processing to get his meat cut to his specifications; it's cheaper for him to have the butchering done at the plant than to have his butchers break down the carcasses. "These smaller facilities do actual butchering," he says. "In big plants it's an assembly line, where one person will make the same one or two cuts all day long."

Sanitary conditions at NY Custom Processing are better than at many restaurant kitchens. To prove this point, Faison pinches off a piece of ground beef as it is extruded through a machine and pops

HOLY COWS



Special breeds, such as Wagyu (above), offer different qualities.

It is no accident that among prestigious breeds of cattle, Angus dominates. "Angus marbles better than any of the other breeds, and it results in the highest graded carcass at cattle shows time and again," says R. John Dawes, an Angus breeder and co-author (with Herman R. Purdy and Robert Hough) of *Breeds of Cattle* (TRS Publishing).

According to Dawes, about 90 percent of commercial beef is Angus crossed with one or more other breeds. "Crossing makes good sense," he says. "It creates hybrid vigor in the first generation, which makes the animals more disease resistant, bigger and stronger."

In 1978, in response to USDA changes in the beef grading system, the American Angus Association created Certified Angus Beef (CAB), which contains, among other requirements, marbling, maturity and weight standards for certification. Initially, the only CAB cattle were graded "choice," the grade just below "prime" in the USDA grading system. In 2000, using similar criteria, the American Angus

Association added a separate segment for beef graded prime.

While Angus dominates the beef kingdom, there are other breeds that populate the beef landscape. The one with the greatest cachet is the Japanese Wagyu. The Wagyu steer is a "composite breed" developed in Japan during the late 19th century by crossbreeding a variety of imported European cattle such as Brown Swiss, Shorthorn, Devon, Holstein and Angus, along with a Korean breed. Though breeding was done in a number of Japanese prefectures, or counties, the Kobe prefecture developed animals with the highest marbling; this is why the name "Kobe" became synonymous with this ultrarich Japanese beef.

Angus and its various crossbreeds are graded prime only some of the time; Wagyu is prime taken to a new level. On the Japanese 12-point grading system for beef, a USDA prime cut would range between four and six points, whereas most Wagyu score nine points or higher. And Wagyus have a higher ratio of more healthful unsaturated fat to less healthful saturated fat than do other cattle.

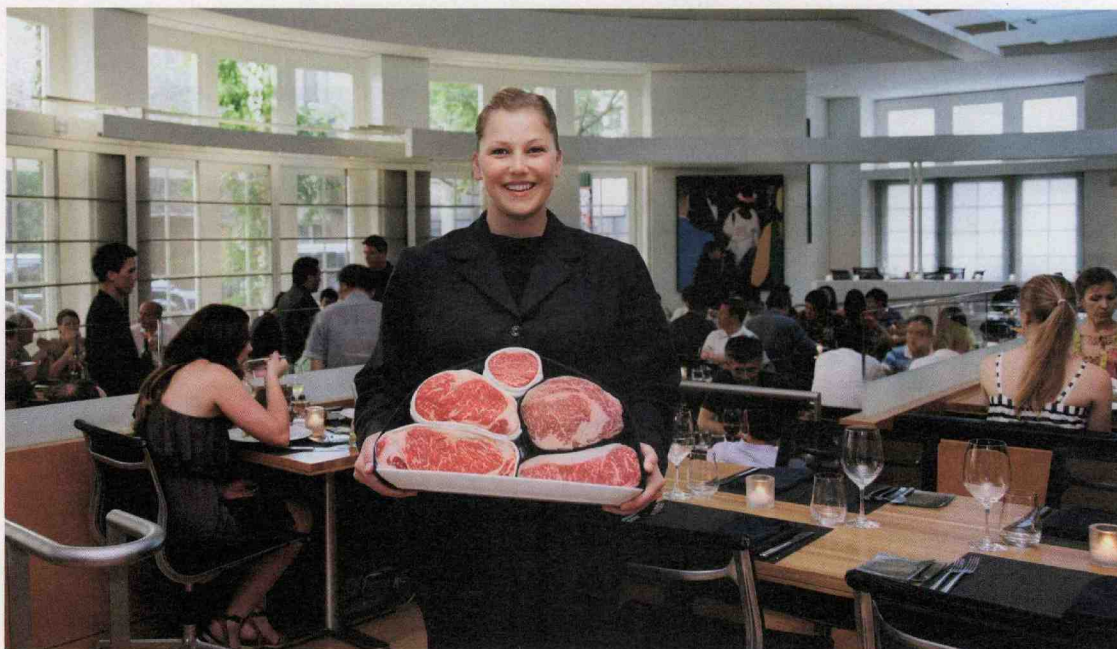
Wagyu-Angus crossbreeds do exist and also have superior marbling. Their cost is more reasonable than the price of pure Wagyu, but the meat is still expensive.

Because Wagyu is so pricey, many people opt to purchase the ground-beef version instead of steaks. George Faison, a partner at renowned beef vendor DeBragga & Spitler, says that the company sells 1,000 pounds of ground Wagyu a week.

The Chianina breed, from the Chiana Valley in Italy's Tuscany region, is famous for being the source of meat for the Italian dish bistecca alla fiorentina. This grilled porterhouse can be as heavy as 6 pounds, as the Chianina bulls can weigh in excess of 3,500 pounds. In the United States, the Chianina is primarily used for breeding. It is not widely available, but a prime Angus would be an adequate substitute.

Other breeds of cattle exist, and some examples include Charolais, Maine-Anjou, Salers and Limousin. While these breeds are highly regarded, their meat can be difficult to find in the United States.

WINE GRIFF/ASSOCIATED PRESS



At Wolfgang Puck's Cut Beverly Hills, the numerous steak selections are brought to the dining room to help guests make the right choice.

it into his mouth. "People ask me how I can eat raw beef," he says. "If I'm not willing to eat raw beef, I can't ask people to eat hamburgers cooked medium-rare, which doesn't kill bacteria."

GRADING

BEEF CARCASSES ARE INSPECTED BY THE U.S.

Department of Agriculture for safety of consumption, but the USDA also grades beef for quality. The quality grading of beef is primarily based on the degree of marbling. Grading isn't done on the entire carcass, however, only on the amount and distribution of marbling in the rib-eye muscle when the carcass is cut between the 12th and 13th ribs.

There are six grades of beef: prime, choice, select, standard, commercial and utility, in descending order of quality. Standard, commercial and utility are not typically sold directly to consumers, but make their way into food service items and canned goods.

The carcass is also examined for the degree of maturity based on the physiological age of the animal (the exact age is more difficult to determine). Carcasses graded A for maturity are nine to 30 months old and should have a light cherry-red color and very fine texture. Older carcasses are graded B.

Prime and choice grades each contain three subcategories, which indicate the degree of marbling. (Select contains two grades, the higher having a slight degree of marbling, and the lower even less.) In prime, the highest degree of marbling is referred to as abundant, followed by moderately abundant and slightly abundant. When high-end steak houses such as Peter Luger's, in New York, and

Bern's, in Tampa, Fla., and upscale retailers like Lobel's and Allen Brothers advertise that they take the top of prime, it is most likely that abundant portion. Prime beef represents 3 percent or less of all beef produced in the United States.

Choice also has three subcategories of abundance of marbling—moderate, modest and small. When the American Angus Association states that its Certified Angus Beef takes only the top two categories, it is referring to beef that has moderate or modest marbling. Those two categories represent about 30 percent of choice.

Just because a steak is graded prime, however, doesn't mean that it will taste better than one graded choice. For one thing, the prime steak might be from the lower end of prime and the choice steak from the upper end of choice. In addition, the prime steak could be from a younger animal, say 18 months, which has less muscle development than a 22-month-old steer graded choice. Good muscle development is a significant flavor factor in beef.

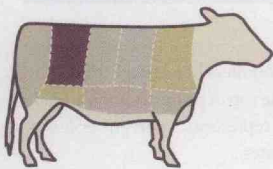
Not very long ago, if you had asked your butcher where his meat came from, what its breed was and what it ate, he probably could not have answered in much detail. You simply found a butcher you trusted and stuck by them. The scene today has changed. There are far fewer butcher shops, but a proliferation of information. It can be confusing, but it also means greater choice and greater control if you invest a little time in finding which factors provide you with the meat you like best.

Ask questions, and expect more from restaurants and retailers. Take greater care in cooking. And be creative. One of the great things about beef—and wine, for that matter—is versatility. So get out of that filet mignon—Cabernet Sauvignon rut and try a flat iron steak with a Chianti Classico, or beef short ribs with a Côtes du Rhône. And if these matches thrill you, also know that there are a lot more where they came from.

THE CUTS

AND HOW TO COOK THEM

*A GUIDE TO WHAT TO BUY AND HOW TO PREPARE,
 FROM FAST AND HOT TO SLOW AND LOW*



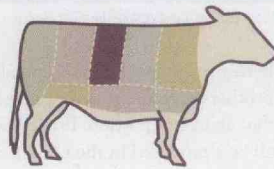
SIRLOIN

Sirloin: This section produces the top and bottom sirloin steaks.
Grill or broil.

Tenderloin roast: The boneless cylinder of meat that runs from the sirloin to the short loin. These meats cook quickly and are extremely tender. *Roast.*

Filet mignon: A popular and rich 6- to 12-ounce steak. The most tender cut, but it offers the least flavor. Filets are often seasoned simply with salt and pepper, but also take well to compound butters and more aggressive sauces. *Grill or broil.*

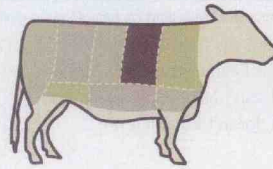
Tri-tip: This triangular piece from the bottom sirloin is not as intensely flavored as the flat iron, hanger or skirt. Because it can be up to 3-inches thick (and weigh up to 3 pounds), it should not be cooked entirely over direct heat on a grill. *Grill or broil, then roast.*



SHORT LOIN

Shell roast: Cut from the mid-back, boneless shell roasts are usually 8 to 10 pounds and are often cooked like tenderloins (and are also known as strip roasts; see recipe, page 48). *Roast.*

Steak (including New York strip, T-bone and porterhouse): Cut from the shell roast, strip steaks are thick and juicy and more flavorful on the bone. Classic T-bone and porterhouse have some tenderloin attached. These are best cooked hot and fast. *Grill or broil.*



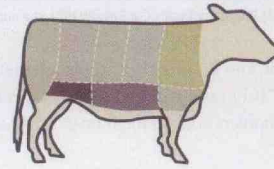
RIB

Rib steak: Cut from the center of the rib roast. This is called a cowboy or tomahawk steak (as in the recipe on page 50) when it is cut with an extended bone, and a rib eye when it's boneless or when the rib extension is removed. *Grill or broil.*

Rib (or standing rib) roast: Larger pieces of meat like this (often weighing in at more than 10 pounds) are best seared at 450° F or 500° F before finishing at 350° F. *Roast.*

Ribs: Ribs should be cooked long at a lower temperature, over indirect heat. Beef ribs usually come from the back of the animal, and have less meat. *Barbecue.*

Short ribs: Generally means ribs toward the chest. They can be butchered several ways, and are distinguished from back ribs by having more meat (see recipe, page 42). *Braise.*



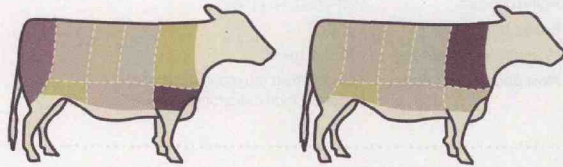
FLANK & PLATE

Flank steak: The abdominal muscle is broad and flat and fairly dense, so it does best with either a marinade to tenderize it before grilling or a slow braise. This is one cut that loves aggressive seasoning and flavors. *Braise, grill or broil.*

Hanger and skirt steaks: These flavorful cuts come from the plate. They are not as tough as chuck roast and not as tender as tenderloin, and also fall in the middle for price and preparation. Hanger is the classic cut for steak frites. Skirt, a coarsely textured cut that looks like a belt (*fajita* in Spanish), should be cut into 8- to 10-inch pieces for even cooking. *Grill or broil.*

BEEF TIPS

1. Season meat before it is cooked, though a good steak or roast doesn't need more than freshly cracked black pepper and sea salt.
2. An instant-read thermometer that is inserted for only 15 or 20 seconds at a time gives a much better reading than a meat thermometer that remains in the meat while it cooks.
3. Doneness guidelines are tricky, however, aim to remove the meat from heat when it reaches the following temperatures: rare, 125° F; medium-rare, 135° F; medium, 145° F; well, 160° F. (The USDA recommends slightly higher temperatures.)
4. Let the meat rest, tented with foil, before cutting into it, to allow juices to equalize. The length of time depends on the size. A steak needs 5 to 10 minutes; a rib roast could need a half-hour.



BRISKET & RUMP

Brisket: Slow-roasting at lower temperatures helps this retain moisture and allows more sinewy roasts to become tender. Desirable browning is hard to achieve at low temperatures, so either brown the roast first on top of the stove, or increase the oven heat to 500° F just before the roast is done. *Roast, braise or barbecue.*

Rump: Larger pieces of meat, and those with meat on the bone, take well to braising to draw out the richest flavors. Brown first, then add vegetables and aromatics to the broth later. *Braise or roast.*

SHOULDER

Chuck: Cuts from areas that get a lot of exercise produce meat that takes more effort on the cook's part to become tender. The payoff, however, is that such cuts are less expensive and very flavorful. Classic stews include beef Bourguignon. (See a recipe for home-ground burgers on page 41 and for manzo in squazet on page 46). *Cubed and stewed; ground for burgers and grilled; braised whole.*

Flat iron steak: This intensely flavored steak can range from 6 ounces to more than 2 pounds. It has a thin line of gristle in the middle. *Grill or broil.*



ROAST

Cook with dry heat in an oven, with minimal liquid—mostly juice from the meat itself. Roasting can involve anything from a relatively small piece of meat, such as a 2-pound tri-tip or tenderloin, to a 12-pound standing rib roast.

BROIL

Reserved for tender pieces of meat. Because home broilers don't get nearly as hot as commercial broilers, a few steps will help make it more efficient. Let the broiler heat up for 15 minutes to make sure it's as hot as possible. The broiler pan on which the steaks will cook should be preheated in the broiler, about 3 inches from the heat source.

GRILL

Cooking meat over direct heat continues to be a popular method for many cuts of beef. Gas grills, especially an increasing array of high-end grills that can exceed \$5,000, have more firepower, better heat control and can sustain cooking over longer periods. Firepower can reach 75,000 BTUs to generate up to 650 degrees of heat. (Lower-end gas grills and charcoal grills generally don't exceed 30,000 BTUs.) Though charcoal has steadily lost out in popularity to gas grills over the years, many believe it gives better flavor to steaks and burgers. Hardwood charcoal gives somewhat better flavor than briquettes, but burns out faster.

STEW

Smaller chunks of tougher cuts of meat are browned in a Dutch oven or similar casserolelike pot. The meat is removed and vegetables are sautéed in the same pot, then broth and wine are added, and the meat is returned to the pot to simmer for several hours.

BRAISE

Braises are prepared similarly to stews except that they often involve less liquid and larger pieces of meat, like a 3-pound chuck roast, or meat on the bone, such as oxtails, short ribs and beef shanks. Meat should be braised in a deep pan with a lid.

BARBECUE

Slow cooking with indirect dry heat in a covered grill or smoker. The process typically takes several hours for cuts such as brisket. The meat is placed in the center of the grill over a drip pan. Charcoal is put on both sides of the meat so that the meat is not directly over the heat source, then the meat is covered. The meat cooks longer at a lower temperature, allowing tough fibers to soften without burning the exterior.

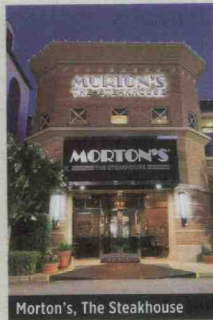
STEAK HOUSE FAVORITES



The Capital Grille



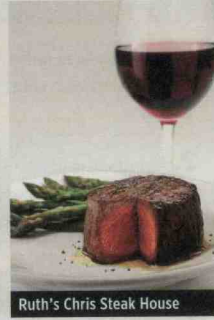
Fleming's Prime Steakhouse



Morton's, The Steakhouse



The Palm



Ruth's Chris Steak House

Hearty portions of top-quality beef, tempting side dishes and expansive wine lists are staples of today's great steak houses. We surveyed five of the largest upscale steak house chains in the *Wine Spectator* Restaurant Awards program, which collectively serve up several million pounds of steak per year across hundreds of locations worldwide. Of course some smaller chains have stellar wine lists and quality beef too; chief among them are Del Frisco's (nine locations) and Smith & Wollensky (10 locations).

For locations of these and other wine-loving steak houses, search our complete 2012 Restaurant Wine List Award listings, free, at WineSpectator.com.

MORTON'S, THE STEAKHOUSE

First location Chicago; 1978
Number of locations today 69, worldwide
Pounds sold per year More than 2 million, total
Most popular cuts Center-cut filet mignon; Signature cut prime New York strip; Chicago-style prime bone-in rib eye
Breeds Angus; Brangus; Charolais; Hereford
Aging process Wet-aged, 14–21 days
Broiler temperature 1,400° F
Most popular appetizer Ahi tuna tower
Most popular side dishes "Twice baked" au gratin potatoes; bacon & onion macaroni & cheese

THE CAPITAL GRILLE

First location Providence, R.I.; 1990
Number of locations today 46, all in the United States
Pounds sold per year Proprietary; less than 1 million
Most popular cuts 10-oz. filet mignon; porcini-rubbed Delmonico
Breeds Angus; Wagyu
Aging process Wet-aged, 21 days; dry-aged 14–21 days on premise
Broiler temperature 800° F
Most popular appetizers Cold shellfish platter; pan-fried calamari with hot cherry peppers; lobster bisque
Most popular side dishes Lobster mac 'n' cheese; grilled asparagus (with lemon mosto and fleur de sel)

THE PALM

First location New York; 1926
Number of locations today 29
Pounds sold per year 1.2 million, total
Most popular cuts 9-oz. filet mignon; 24-oz. prime bone-in rib eye
Breeds NA
Aging process Wet-aged, minimum of 35 days
Broiler temperature 1,200° F
Most popular appetizers Lobster bisque; jumbo shrimp cocktail
Most popular side dishes Creamed spinach; three-cheese potatoes au gratin

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE

First location Newport Beach, Calif.; 1998
Number of locations today 64, all in the United States
Pounds sold per year 500,000 filet; 210,00 strip; 370,000 rib eye
Most popular cuts Petite filet mignon; prime rib eye; prime bone-in rib eye
Breeds Angus; Hereford; Charolais; Holstein
Aging process Wet-aged, 21–28 days
Broiler temperature 1,600° F
Most popular appetizers Sweet chili calamari; jumbo lump crabcakes
Most popular side dishes Fleming's potatoes (with cream, jalapeños and cheddar); grilled high-country asparagus

RUTH'S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE

First location New Orleans; 1965
Number of locations today 133, worldwide
Pounds sold per year 2.2 million filet; 4.4 million, total
Most popular cuts Filet mignon; rib eye; New York strip
Breeds NA
Aging process Wet-aged, 21–28 days
Broiler temperature 1,800° F (custom broiler)
Most popular appetizers Calamari (lightly fried in sweet and spicy Asian chili sauce); mushrooms stuffed with crabmeat
Most popular side dish Garlic mashed potatoes

THE CAPITAL GRILLE; FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR; LAMPORIS, INC.; COURTESY THE PALM; KURT COSTE