

Quality Care Matters

A Column about Dairy Animal Care provided by the Pennsylvania Beef Council



Retailer Initiated Audits

In part two of our series on audits, we explore animal welfare audits initiated by retail partners. This article will spotlight Whole Foods Market, an industry innovator that's pioneering a new system—on the farm.

Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Whole Foods Market is the world's leader in natural and organic food retailing, with 300 stores in North America and the United Kingdom. East Coast shoppers will be familiar with the company's stores in Maryland, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Washington.

In 2011, Whole Foods Market will unveil a new companywide initiative—all beef, pork and chicken in its stores' meat cases will be sourced from third-party audited farms, including Pennsylvania beef farms that sell into the Mid-Atlantic region.

"We think this program will certainly open consumers' eyes and break new ground by raising the bar for the entire meat industry," said Jason Belleau, the company's Mid-Atlantic meat coordinator. "We want to take animal welfare standards to the next level by differentiating our growers from others in the industry who might not have as high standards."

Recognized for sharing its farmers' stories through point-of-sale and in-store demonstrations, Whole Foods will educate customers about on-farm audits through signage, pamphlets, stickers and team-member education, Belleau said.

The retailer adopted its audit's animal welfare standards from GAP, (Global Animal Partnership) an international nonprofit foundation "dedicated to facilitating and encouraging continuous improvement in animal agriculture."

GAP advocates a 5-step animal welfare rating standard, including 1) no crowding, 2) enriched environment, 4) pasture centered, 5) animal centered — no physical alterations, and 5+) animal centered — entire life on same farm. (Note there is no 3) enhanced outdoor access, for beef.)

Participating producers can find details on every step in the 26-page Global Animal Partnership 5 Step Animal Welfare Rating Standards for Beef Cattle, downloadable on GAP's website, www.globalanimalpartnership.org.

"In Pennsylvania, 15 farms, who are all PA Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certified, have completed the process by a third-party auditor," said Erick Jensen, president of Pineland Natural Meats, a Whole Foods vendor that procures beef for the Mid-Atlantic region.

"Auditors are looking at animals, records and facilities," he said.

"The goal is to find solutions to improve the facility or operation."

Jensen and his staff are often at the farm during the initial audit.

"We want to help our farmers every step of the way," he said. "We try to make it as painless as possible."

To date, all state beef farms supplying Whole Foods have completed the basic requirements of Step 1, qualifying for entry into the GAP 5-step program. Higher steps are elective after farms meet Step 1. Belleau views the higher step ratings as an incentive for producers to create additional product demand.

"The higher a farm's step rating, the higher the demand will be by the Whole Foods customer base for their product," Belleau said.

Dan Musselman, a BQA certified feeder from Bethel in Berks County, Pa., participated in a GAP audit this summer.

"I probably was more prepared than most people because I previously went through a GAP chicken audit," he said. "I knew what to expect."

Musselman said he "did his homework," updating his record books and fixing anything in his facilities that might be slightly questionable. His audit lasted about 2½ hours and included a walk through the operation with the auditor, observing cattle behavior and housing conditions.

The auditor also reviewed his records and asked Musselman to explain his protocol for identifying steers treated with antibiotic who don't qualify for Whole Foods program.

"I think she (the auditor) was pleased," he said.

Although Musselman passed his first audit, those producers with audit issues can give corrective action, in writing and pictures, to the auditor.

According to Belleau, a producer can expect an audit about every 15 months, allowing the auditor to view the animals, and facility, in different seasons.

While Jensen knows some producers are intimidated by the process, he thinks audits, like those required by Whole Foods, really are "rewarding producers for the good practices they already do."

In the case of Whole Foods, the reward is also financial — producers that meet Whole Foods' production criteria can receive a premium for their cattle.

To learn more about Whole Foods Markets, visit www.wholefoods.com. Find more information about Pineland Natural Meats at www.pinelandnaturalmeats.com.



Photos courtesy Pa. Beef Council

Dennis Byrne of Herr Angus Farms (on halter) helps Mike Devitt, vice president of Indian Ridge Provisions, and other members of the tour group get acquainted with one of the farm's beef calves.

Beef Council, Producers Host Farm Tour

MOUNT JOY, Pa. — The Pennsylvania Beef Council partnered with Herr Angus Farms of Nottingham, Pa., and Nissley Brothers Farm of Mount Joy, Pa., to host more than 15 Indian Ridge Provisions sales representatives and local chefs Nov. 3 during an interactive farm tour.

Indian Ridge Provisions of Telford, Pa., is a purveyor of fine meat and fresh seafood, and is working to drive beef sales by helping Pennsylvania restaurants add local beef to their menus.

The tour kicked off at Herr Angus Farms, where the group received a first-hand look at a cow/calf operation during a pasture tour.

The group boarded a hay wagon and headed to the fields while Dennis Byrne, manager of Herr Angus Farms, spoke about the farm's day-to-day operation, its commitment to animal health, genetics and nutrition, and the importance of sustainability.

"We try to be as efficient as possible with the resources we have," Byrne said. "We take this very seriously."

Herr Angus Farm is a division of Herr Foods, a family-owned snack food company in Nottingham, Pa. The farm raises 1,400 custom fed beef cattle annually. In addition, it has 100 brood cows that calve each year into its embryo transfer program.

An additional 50 cows are bred to Angus bulls for the company's freezer beef customers and as 4-H youth prospect steers.



The tour group of Indian Ridge Provisions sales representatives and local chefs pose for a group photo at Nissley Brothers Farm in Mount Joy, Pa.

Next, the group headed to Nissley Brothers, a seventh generation family-operated farm and feedlot.

Bernard Nissley, his wife, Rhonda, and his brother Darwin welcomed the group and proceeded with a walking tour of the farm, including a look at the barns, corral system and feed bunks.

Nissley Brothers feeds cattle for 120 to 130 days, with an average weight gain of 3 pounds per day. Darwin Nissley explained how they work with a nutritionist to provide their cattle with a healthy

and efficient ration.

"We take care of these animals the best way we can to produce the best possible beef," Nissley said. "We try to give you a good product that you can put on the table — a product that tastes exceptional and is a value for the money."

The tour gave Indian Ridge and its chef customers a better understanding of the beef production cycle and an opportunity to ask questions of the people who raise quality beef for restaurants across the commonwealth.

Bricco Captures 2010 Pennsylvania Beef Backer Award

BEDFORD, Pa. — After a difficult selection process, the Pennsylvania Beef Council has announced the state winner of the 2010 Beef Backer Contest.

This prestigious award program recognizes restaurants that go the extra mile in marketing beef in their establishments and on their menus.

Applicants from across the state submitted entries to showcase their innovation and leadership in many areas including creative menu ap-

plications, new cut utilization, and effective communication programs.

Bricco, 31 S. Third St., Harrisburg, won this year's contest and will receive an award plaque to display in the restaurant. Bricco also will represent the commonwealth in the national competition, with National Beef Backer winners announced in January at the cattle industry annual convention in Denver, Colo.

Bricco is a Tuscan-style restaurant and the result of a collabora-

tion between the Olewine School of Culinary Arts at Harrisburg Area Community College and Harrisburg Hotel Corp., managing general partner of The Hilton Harrisburg.

Bricco not only serves as an instructional restaurant but also boasts two retail shops, Olewine's Meat and Cheese House and Ciao! Bakery.

Executive chef Jason Viscount features a number of sizzling steak entrees on his menu, including a 12-

ounce prime beef strip steak and a mouth-watering 8-ounce center cut filet. Other satisfying menu items include a steak and cheese calzone and braised beef short ribs. All of Bricco's beef cuts are available right around the corner at Olewine's Meat and Cheese House.

Chef Viscount makes it a priority to source beef from local producers. Bricco is a member of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's PA Preferred program, which em-

phasizes the use of locally produced products. Most recently, Bricco was awarded the 2010 Governor's Award for Excellence in the Culinary Arts.

Bricco is open for lunch 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; and for dinner 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 4:30 p.m.-10 p.m. Sunday.

For a complete menu, visit www.briccopa.com or contact the restaurant at 717-724-0222.