



AGGIE-STYLE meat education

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Texas A&M has spent years supporting the industry with its meat workshops, courses and camps

In 1989, the Texas Beef Council was looking for a way to educate its staff about the beef industry. The council was responsible for marketing beef, but many members of the staff didn't really understand the process of how beef got from farm to fork. It approached Texas A&M Univ., which is known as having one of the country's top meat science collegiate programs, and requested a special program to educate its staff on the basics of the beef industry – and Beef 101 was born.

Word quickly spread about the program and the following year, representatives from other state beef councils requested to attend. The popularity continued to grow as yearly Beef 101 classes were held at A&M. Today, members of the meat industry worldwide have the option of attending the three-day intensive hands-on Beef 101 course offered each year at the university now four times a year in May, June, September and December.

“For land-grant universities [like Texas A&M], service, outreach and extension is a major part of what we do,” says Jeffrey Savell, Regents Professor and EM “Manny” Rosenthal Chairholder in the Dept. of Animal Science at Texas A&M. “These workshops have become a vital part of our work with the industry.”

Each Beef 101 workshop begins with

evaluation of beef cattle to learn about how cattle are raised, fed and handled. Participants also estimate live cattle parameters that will later be measured on beef carcasses they will encounter in the fabrication laboratory. Later, participants learn about the procedures for beef-carcass grading and the various premium programs now being applied to many carcasses.

The most popular activity in the workshop is conducted on the second day of the course. Participants are given the unique opportunity to team up with other classmates and an instructor to cut an entire side of beef into component parts. Beef anatomy, beef-cut identification and component part yields and values are discussed at length during and after the day-long laboratory activity.

To round out the education on beef from farm to fork, instructors lead a thorough discussion of beef palatability including sampling various cuts to demonstrate how various cuts, grades and technologies may affect the beef-eating experience.

HELPING PRODUCERS

In 1992, after the National Beef Quality Audit, which identified and quantified quality defects in the beef industry, Texas A&M partnered with the Texas Beef Council to help educate Texas



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cattle producers about producing quality beef. The flagship educational activity for this effort was A&M’s Beef 706 course.

“Beef 706 teaches cattle producers about the food side of their industry,” says Dr. Dan Hale, Texas Agri Life Extension Service. “They learn a lot about where the value is in the cattle they raise and ultimately why we are in the business of raising quality cattle, which is for a food product for the consumer.”

Beef 706 participants learn about the importance of producing a more-consistent and high-quality beef product through a series of hands-on lessons presented by various meat-science faculty, staff and graduate students. For example, the participants are divided into groups, allowed to select live cattle (through video) and then follow the cattle through grading and a hands-on cutting session, which allows participants a chance to experience first-hand the differences encountered in carcass composition. Their resulting information is then evaluated in terms of the value differences calculated between the carcasses and how that translates back to value differences in the live animals – information that isn’t typically relayed to the producer.

The Texas Beef Council sponsors the attendance of approximately 30 producers per

course. “They [Texas Beef Council] see the benefit that if producers understand better about producing high-quality beef for the consumer, then that will improve the product for the consumer,” Hale says.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION

In addition to the beef courses offered to industry professionals through Texas A&M, the university also offers a similar styled hands-on Pork 101 course. The course is hosted by the American Meat Science Association (AMSA) and sponsored by Elanco Animal Health. The program, which is also sponsored by the American Association of Meat Processors (AAMP), American Society of Animal Science (ASAS), North American Meat Institute Foundation (NAMIF) and the Southwest Meat Association (SMA), is available to anyone involved in the production, processing and marketing of pork at Texas A&M, May 19-21, and at Iowa State Univ., Oct. 19-21.

The Pork 101 program was designed to update participants on quality and consistency issues in the pork industry. It includes insight on value differences in swine, pork carcasses, pork primals and processed-pork products due to quality variation. Participants have the chance to evaluate eight live hogs. The animals will be processed during the class with participants learning about grading, food safety and processing. Finally, the class will make and sample processed product from the hogs including pumped loins, bacon, hams and sausage.

Other courses available to the meat industry include a two-day grass-fed beef conference, which explores all facets of grass-fed beef production including nutrition, herd health, carcass fabrication, marketing and sustainability. In addition, several Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) training courses are offered throughout the year by the meat science department, in conjunction with the International HACCP Alliance.

CRAZY FOR BBQ

Hands down, the most-popular courses the meat-science department offers involve Texas barbecue. The department added several barbecue-centric classes in the past four to five years and they continue to draw participants.

“Our Barbecue Summer Camp sold out in 45 seconds,” Savell says.

Barbecue Summer Camp is a weekend-long course featuring professors from the meat-science department, well-known pit masters and regional barbecue authorities. Discussion topics include types of meat, smoke and spices and there are a number of cooking and butchery demonstrations throughout the course. The online course description reads, “We will gather together deep in the heart of Texas for this meat and smoke-filled (wood smoke that is) weekend, where we will roll up our sleeves and learn about unique barbecue traditions, methods and styles.”

Camp Brisket is another barbecue education option – a two-day program that concentrates solely on the brisket. Instructors will help participants overcome the challenges faced with proper selection, trimming, seasoning, smoking and serving the quintessential Texas barbecue meat cut.

STUDENTS AS TEACHERS

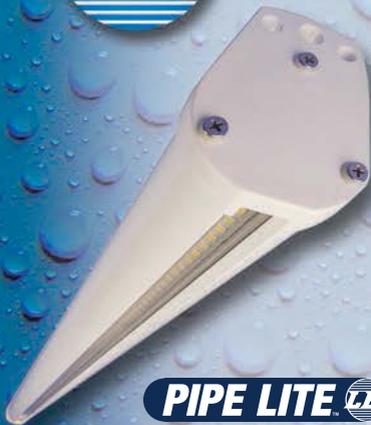
Texas A&M’s Meat Science Dept. not only features an impressive list of faculty but many courses – like Beef 101, Beef 706 and Pork 101 – utilize meat science graduate students to help with instruction. In each of these programs, graduate students lead cutting groups showing participants how and where to cut the beef and pork carcasses and ensure appropriate safety measures are followed. The grad students are knowledgeable about specific cuts and their uses, names of muscles and bones, and grading.

“The grad students greatly increase their teaching skills with their involvement in these courses,” Savell says. This work helps prepare them to be better teaching assistants for other meat-science courses they work with.

“All of the industry classes we offer at A&M help with our exposure within the industry,” Savell says. “Our exposure helps with university recruitment and ultimately with the placement of our students after graduation.” 



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