

Ponderosa Tests Pork On Menu



QUINCY, IL — Wilmington, Ohio, was the site of a breakthrough for pork producers on Monday, April 18, 1988. America's Cut — a lean, boneless pork fillet created to help retailers market pork — was served for the first time in a national chain restaurant. The introduction was the beginning of a year-long test to be performed at the Wilmington Ponderosa.

If America's Cut is successful in Wilmington, Ponderosa officials will consider broadening distribution to other locations within the 600+ store chain.

The story of how pork found its way into a steak house is a good example of how grassroots promotion efforts can move big companies into action. All it takes is a little hard work and a lot of per-

severance. And Rich Werner, a district sales manager for Moorman Manufacturing Company, deserves a large chunk of the credit for creating this new opportunity for pork.

Last fall, Werner was planning a meeting for his sales representatives at the Wilmington Ponderosa and he asked the owner to serve charbroiled pork. The owner laughed.

Pork in a steak house? The Wilmington, Ohio, Ponderosa introduced America's Cut in April as a test production for the national chain. First to be served by franchise owner John Holt were (seated clockwise from front left): Rich Werner and Mike Earley, both representing Moorman Mfg. Co.; and Jeff Murphy and Keith Gibson, officers of the Clinton County Pork Producers.

"The only thing I could picture was a breaded, fried chop," remembers John Holt, owner of the Wilmington franchise. "I didn't really know what quality, charbroiled pork tasted like." Though Werner settled for another menu choice at that first meeting, he was persistent. The MoorMan sales manager held monthly meetings at the Ponderosa and he kept the pressure on Holt to serve charbroiled pork.

Then Werner had an idea he thought might convince Holt to put "the other white meat" on the menu. Werner brought extra thick-cut pork chops to the restaurant and asked Holt to prepare them, and then join the MoorMan folks for lunch. The restaurant owner was sold with the first bite; but because Ponderosa's menu guidelines are very structured, it wasn't going to be easy to add pork to the menu. Holt decided to apply to become a Ponderosa test market for the pork product.

The franchise owner researched pork preparation and sought out pork suppliers. He learned about America's Cut and decided it would be perfect for his business. According to the National Pork Producers Council, the official America's Cut must come from the center loin portion of the hog and be between 1 and 1/4 to 1 and 1/2 inches thick. No more than 1/4 inch of fat cover is allowed. Holt liked the fact that America's Cut was guaranteed to be consistently lean, tender and uniform in size. "It is really a premium cut and serving a quality product is my major concern," says Holt.

The Wilmington Ponderosa owner filled out the test market application and waited to hear from Ponderosa headquarters. But Holt was a newcomer to the Ponderosa organization, so he believed it was a long shot that he'd be selected as a test site. While Holt was doing his paperwork, Werner and his sales representatives were doing their own leg work enlisting the Clinton County Pork Producers. President Keith Gibson arranged to hold the association's annual banquet at the Wilmington Ponderosa. Over 150 pork producers tasted the meal Holt proposed to test — charbroiled America's Cut, salad buffet and potato.

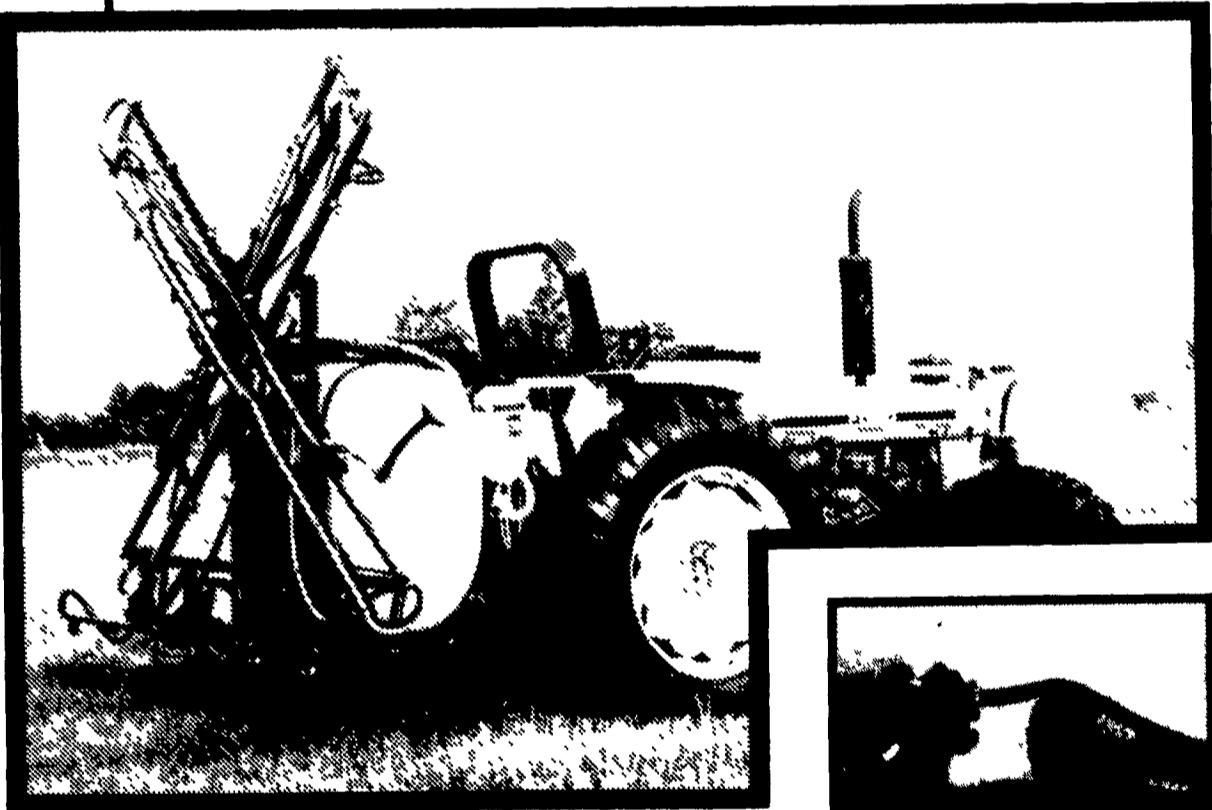
Following the annual banquet, members of the Clinton County Pork Producers generated more than 200 letters to Ponderosa's headquarters in Dayton, Ohio, requesting America's Cut on the menu. Shortly afterward, Holt was given the O.K. to be the first franchise to test it. The Wilmington Ponderosa menu now includes a 6-ounce America's Cut, which sells for \$5.99. MoorMan's, the National Pork Producers Council and the local pork producers continue to support the product through local advertising and promotion.

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