

Entrepreneur Raises Belgian Blue For Lean Beef Market

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Lancaster Farming Staff

MOUNT JOY (Lancaster Co.)

— When Brent Brubaker talks about his Belgian Blue cattle, his words tumble over each other in his enthusiasm for the breed.

"The genetics produce lean, tender beef 40 percent more quickly than other breeds and 40 percent leaner," he said.

While a staunch Holstein supporter might think the Belgian Blue breed appears a bit odd with its lumpy rumps and bluish black spots, Brubaker believes the breed with its Belgian origin is beautiful and tasty.

In fact, taste with low fat content is the reason that Brubaker began raising the breed.

He is convinced that if the fat content in beef is lowered and the price is competitive with other meats, the market for beef will explode.

Plans for marketing the Belgian Beef he is raising under the label of Lancaster Lite Beef are already in the final stage.

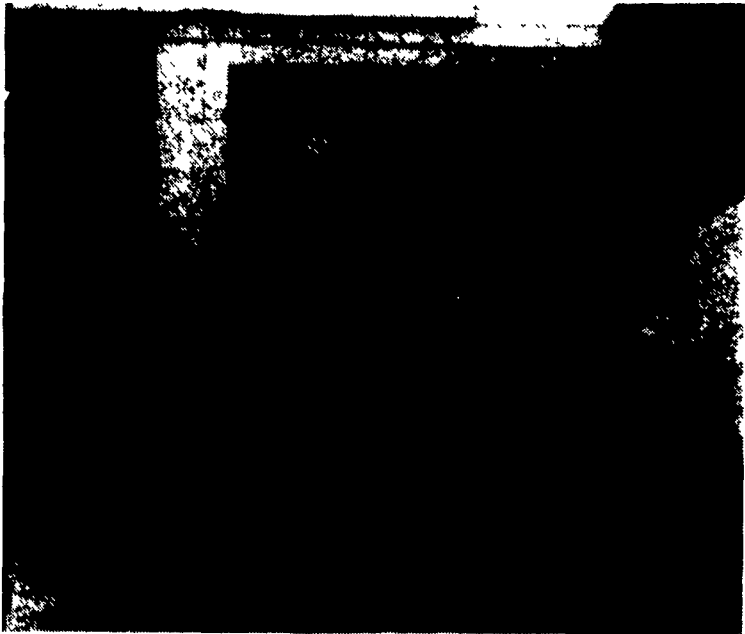
A former 4-H'er and president of the county 4-H dairy club, Brubaker said his heart was always in farming. He grew up raising beef and milking cows on his grandfather's Mount Joy farm, which is now owned by his father J. Kenneth Brubaker and an uncle Harold Brubaker.

He went to college to study marketing and was graduated two years ago. His enthusiasm for the Belgian Blue breed was sparked, when as a college junior, he visited his uncle's farm in Ashboro, N.C. His uncle raises Belgian Blues for breeding purposes. He selects cattle from Belgian, which are imported via England because of import restrictions.

Brubaker was intrigued that the breed's genetics was known to



Brent Brubaker stands in front of the barn that had been his grandfather's and now is owned by his dad and a uncle, but used by Brent to raise Belgium Blue cattle.



Brubaker prefers that pictures of his cattle be taken from the rear where the difference is most noticeable between Belgian Blues and other breeds. The cattle have what is referred to as double muscling.

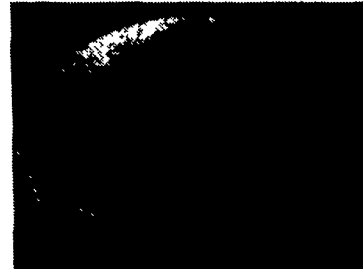
grow 40 percent more rapidly and produce 40 percent more meat than Angus, Herefords, and Continental breeds.

The lumpy appearance of the cattle is not fat, but double muscling, which means more meat when butchered.

On the rail, the carcass has little fat cover and there is little marbeling.

The breed is rare in the U.S., but growing. Brubaker estimates that there are about 2,000 scattered across the states.

"Belgian Blues fatten faster and are ready to butcher at a younger age, which makes the breed a more profitable meat animal than another breed," Brubaker said.



This is a picture of the steaks that Brent markets under the label of Lancaster Lite Beef. Marbeling and fat cover is less than that of USDA choice and prime.

"The beef industry wants fat cover and heavy marbeling for quality beef, because they think fat makes beef taste better," Brubaker said. "But I can produce steak that

will taste as good and tender without the fat."

Because beef is graded by fat marbling rather than taste, the Belgian Blue appears more like a good grade than choice or prime.

"I can produce steak that is only graded good under present USDA standards and it will taste as good and tender as a prime. The industry believes quality equals marbeling and fat, but I say quality equals tenderness and fat to some degree," Brubaker said.

Fat comparisons by a local laboratory show that a Lancaster Lite boneless roast has 1.8 grams of fat and a T-bone steak 2.7 grams fat compared with 18.2 grams of a T-bone USDA choice. A whole skinless chicken has 6.4 grams.

"My target market is females from 20 to 50 who are educated on health issues," Brubaker said.

This segment of the population is less inclined to eat red meat because of the fat content, but would be interested in purchasing beef that is comparable in fat and price to chicken and fish.

"If it (lean beef) costs too much, it eliminates the market," he said.

"To be marketable, it must have these four qualities — lean, taste, high quality, and the right price."

Brubaker believes his beef is the solution. While other segments of the industry are experimenting

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