

Visionary Design Founder Invents New Ways To Use Beef, Other Meats

(Continued from Page A1)

Gagliardi recently demonstrated the slinder to the media. Raw material is sliced through the Slinder plate, which effectively extracts sufficient natural proteins, allowing the material to bind without additives.

The Slinder process is so effective, Gagliardi noted, that traditional "hamburgers" eat like a good steak.

Gagliardi invented another product, the "Guard Dog," in 1996, a safety cutter device for hot dogs. Used before cooking, the Guard Dog scores eight cuts in the hot dog, allowing the dog to stay whole as it is heated and served.

Hot dogs, Gagliardi noted, are the leading cause of fatal choking in children. By making slits into the length of the hot dog, when the dogs are chewed they are broken up into little bits.

The big news: a new product has come from Gagliardi's kitchen. Called "Frank Fries," the product uses French cut hot dogs covered with a sweet and savory corn dog-style breading and lightly fried to a crisp golden coating.

Gagliardi said that big companies and fast food chains are looking at Frank Fries with interest.

Gagliardi's R&D Ranch is a consulting company for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), where new products are envisioned, developed, and tested. He's also a consultant to the Pennsylvania Beef Council on new product introductions and marketing.

The business of R&D Ranch? According to Gagliardi, the idea is to work on "different cuts" and ways to use the less ideal cuts, such as the shoulder, the knuckle, and other areas of the beef carcass to "add value to the product." About half of a beef carcass is processed into ground beef — and ground beef, at times, is hard to move in the grocery store.

So NCBA contacted Visionary Design and R&D Ranch to come up with a way to get products, such as the beef knuckle and the flat — the outside bottom round — into value-added products.

"Historically the beef cutting business does everything the same way," said Gagliardi. "They use this part for steak, this part for the roast, and the rest ground beef.

This hasn't changed. But consumers want convenience, on a par with chicken.

"Beef is difficult to make to form value-added food. Chicken is easy to do," said the Visionary Design president.

Gagliardi noted that he was coming back on a plane one day and, when the airline meal was being distributed, the attendants were asking the passengers what they would prefer: chicken or beef. A riot, he said, practically broke out when the attendants ran out of chicken.

People heard the word "beef," thinking only of other items, not steak. He believes the offer should have been "chicken or steak." When Gagliardi looks at the less preferred cuts from the carcass, he doesn't see ground beef. He sees additional cuts, a "diamond in the rough," from which he can extract muscles and recut the beef to make steaks.

The key is taking the time to cut into the muscle correctly, denude the beef (remove the fat), and prepare the cut appropriately. Some of the cuts can be made into sirloin tips, London broil, roasts, and others.

Recently Visionary Design, with 23 clients and growing, was host to reporters from USA Today and Progressive Grocer. Gagliardi explained the new cuts of beef he developed, including the Rotiss-A-Roast, available in stores.

The roasts come in a one-pound package and are similar to the deli-style rotisserie chickens, a hot competitor for the beef industry.

The "knuckle" cut is the part of the kneecap, the hardest muscle to move from the round. But the knuckle, if cut correctly, can be used to make roast beef, London broils, steaks, sirloin tips, beefsteaks, and Philadelphia cheesesteaks.

The cuts are lean. The center portion is the most tender.

From the knuckle can be processed 10-12 steaks, two London broils, sirloin tips, and 14 four-ounce hamburgers, according to Gagliardi in a videotaped demonstration.

"Traditionally the knuckle has been ground down," said Gagliardi. He has managed to work out several value-added products, if only the industry would pay



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Gagliardi recently constructed a new house, finished in 1994 with the help of several friends. The 4,800-square foot home was built Williamsburg, Primitive Hall Style, to resemble a home from the 1800s.



Gagliardi's made it big on some of his ideas as president of a company he founded, Visionary Design, based in West Fallowfield Township in Chester County.

attention.

Another cut that can be further processed, instead of being ground down, is the shoulder, the clod sub-primal. The processor can make roasts, London broils, steaks, and Philadelphia cheesesteaks. This includes the clod heart, the flatiron, and the shoulder bone and boller roast (the clod heart).

From the clod heart can be made kebabs, steaks, or London broil. From the flatiron, or top blade, some steaks can be made, as well as excellent pot roast, according to Gagliardi.

The shoulder clod has to be needle-tenderized, he noted.

For processing the flat or outside bottom round, processors can trim and denude it. Get rid of the silver membrane, noted Gagliardi. The meat can be made into corned beef or roast beef or "whatever," Gagliardi noted. With a tenderizer, many roasts can be made.

A big steak, what Gagliardi refers to as "Texas Steak," can be made. "Something other than roast," he said.

At the Thursday event, several industry leaders spoke at Visionary Design/R&D Ranch. The

included Carl Blackwell, executive director, new product development, for NCBA; Joseph A. DePippo, New Product Development Team, NCBA; and Antonio Mata, also of the new product development team, NCBA.

Elizabeth A. Timmins is executive vice president of Visionary Design. The company employs two full time, including Frank Oas, who has worked with Gagliardi for more than 20 years. Timmins has been working with Gagliardi for 13 years.

Joyce Schaeffer, accountant/secretary, was recently hired full time.

Together with Gagliardi, "we do crank more ideas out than anybody around," said Gagliardi.

Gagliardi also farms. His daughter, Jill, 39, takes care of a cow/calf herd of Red Angus at Wolf's Hollow Farms. At the farm, Gagliardi cares for 35 head of cows, most from Leachman, in Montana. Wolf's Hollow sells feeders.

Gene Gagliardi purchased the farm with his wife of 47 years, Joan, in 1987 from a bank for \$1.5

(Turn to Page A23)