

News Release

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PUBLIC INVITED TO SAMPLE BEEF CUTS AT 'BEEF FOR FATHERS' DAY' EVENT June 3 at Capitol Market

The public is invited to try West Virginia Grown beef at a "Beef for Father's Day" sampling event at Capitol Market Wednesday, June 3 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick and other dignitaries will make comments starting at noon.

The event is being co-sponsored by the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), the West Virginia Beef Industry Council and local cattle producers. State, local and industry representatives will be on hand to answer questions about beef farming and the beef industry.

Following this kickoff, events will also be held in Inwood (June 6), Parkersburg (June 12), Clarksburg, (June 16) and Beckley (June 19) to promote West Virginia's \$200 million beef cattle industry.

"The beef cattle industry is well established throughout West Virginia," said Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick. "In fact, in terms of dollar value, it's second only our commercial poultry industry."

Most of the state's cattle are sold at livestock auctions and shipped to the Midwest for slaughter, bringing dollars into the state. Some of the state's beef is sold through local markets or directly to consumers, which typically provides farmers with more work and uncertainty, but a higher percentage of profits.

Grilling still an affordable option

Memorial Day is generally considered the kick-off to summer, but Father's Day is when grilling season hits its full stride.

A prime steak hot off the grill has been a favorite of fathers since cavemen discovered fire. Cuts such as the ribeye, strip and tenderloin filet deliver a lot of bang for the buck in terms of flavor, nutrition and tenderness with little more than the addition of 8-10 minutes of fire.

But that bang is coming at more bucks than previous years. Beef remains at record-high prices in grocery stores, largely because of the cost of feeding cattle in the drought-stricken, but cattle-rich western half of the county. Despite the price, beef demand has remained strong, even though some may opt for hamburgers or less expensive cuts of steak.

Chuck eye and flat iron cuts are flavorful and can be easily grilled. Tri-tip, top sirloin and various cuts of round steak offer "grillability" and lean fat content – at half the cost of filets and other top-dollar cuts.

"Beef is a cornerstone of the state's agricultural economy, and I'm committed to finding ways to keep West Virginia cattle and West Virginia dollars in this state," said Commissioner Helmick. "West Virginians consume over \$7 billion in food every year, yet we produce less than \$1 billion. Switching to locally produced and processed beef could go a long way toward alleviating that gap."

For a list of meat marketers in West Virginia, visit

http://www.wvagriculture.org/Brochures/Foods_and_Things/Meats_Poultry.html

For more information, visit www.wvagriculture.org, or www.wvbeef.org.

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Beef nutrition, safety and environmental impact

Besides being a flavor favorite for the grill, beef is naturally nutrient-rich, giving consumers a large amount of nutritional content per calorie. Beef has eight times more vitamin B12, six times more zinc and two and a half times more iron than a skinless chicken breast. Plus, 20 of the 29 lean beef cuts have, on average, only one more gram of saturated fat than a 3-ounce serving of skinless chicken breast.

Beef also is a safe, highly regulated, domestically grown product. Beef cattle typically graze on land unsuitable for

crops, especially in West Virginia's hilly terrain. Most of their weight is gained on a diet of grass. They typically receive supplemental grain in the final few months before slaughter to increase the amount of marbling - or fat contained within the meat - which enhances flavor and tenderness.

Thanks to continually improving genetics and management practices, beef farmers use fewer resources to produce more beef each year. In the mid-1970s, the average beef cow yielded less than 500 pounds of meat. In 2011, beef production per cow was 722 pounds.

Put another way, the number of beef cattle dropped from 132 million in 1975 to 91 million in 2011. However the total pounds of meat produced has remained virtually the same.

The life cycle of beef cattle:

Birth - Cattle have a nine-month gestation period, and while calves can be born year round, many ranchers plan calving for the spring of each year.

Cow-calf operation - Most beef calves are born on cow-calf operations. These are farms and ranches like those you may see along highways and country roads. During this stage, cattle graze in herds on large pastures within sight of their mothers.

Weaning - As calves reach six to 10 months of age, they are weaned from their mothers. Weaned male calves (steers) may graze until about one year old (yearlings) and then be sold to a cattle feeder or a stocker/backgrounder who will prepare the animal for the feedlot. Once most cattle reach approximately 12-18 months of age, they are taken to a feedlot.

Livestock auction markets - Most cow-calf operators sell their weaned calves at livestock auction markets, where calves are bought by cattle producers called stockers and backgrounders. There are approximately 815 fixed auction facilities throughout rural America, according to the USDA.

Life at the feedlot - Feedlots look different than cow-calf and backgrounding operations because cattle typically are separated into herds of 100 animals and live in pens that allow about 125 to 250 square feet of room per animal. Cattle usually spend four to six months in a feedlot, during which they are fed a scientifically formulated ration averaging 70 percent to 90 percent grain, and have constant access to water.

Transportation - Once cattle have reached 18 to 22 months old or weigh between 1,100 and 1,250 pounds, they are typically considered "finished" and are transported to packing plants to be slaughtered and butchered.

Arriving at the packing plant - The slaughter process has evolved over the years based on scientific research to ensure both humane animal treatment and the production of safe food. The Humane Slaughter Act (passed in 1958 and updated in 1978 and 2002) dictates strict animal handling and slaughtering standards for packing plants. These facilities are under continuous federal inspection, with Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) personnel present in plants to ensure compliance with all regulations.

Safety inspections/federal regulations - There are a number of interventions in place that decrease potential food safety issues at packing plants. Because this is the last stage before beef is packaged, plants use multiple interventions to ensure that products are safe. Inspectors oversee the slaughter practices, food safety interventions and carcass grading that take place at packing plants.

Beef facts:

- Cattle farming has been around for quite a while. In 1493 Christopher Columbus introduced cattle to the Western Hemisphere on his second voyage to the New World. Hernando Cortez brought the first cattle to the North American continent in 1519, setting up ranches in Mexico. Around the same time, a cattle industry was emerging in Florida.
- About 46 percent of beef producers nationwide say they rely on off-farm income, even though two-thirds say they work more than 1,000 hours a year on their farming operations.
- During the War of 1812, a Troy, New York meatpacker, Sam Wilson, obtained a contract to supply beef to the Army. Wilson, who was known locally as "Uncle Sam," shipped the meat salted, in barrels. The barrels, being government property, were branded "U.S." and the teamsters and soldiers joked that the barrels were the initials of Uncle Sam himself. The association with the federal government stuck.

- Approximately 85 percent of U.S. grazing land is unsuitable for producing crops.
- Cattle and beef production represent the largest single segment of American agriculture. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says more farms are classified as beef cattle operations (35 percent) than any other type of farm.

There are more than 800,000 beef producers in the United States who raise more than 100 million head of beef cattle.