



## Prospecting Chefs

Besides working farmers markets and delivering halves and wholes, another great source of meat customers is the restaurant trade.

Restaurants that serve your beef can also help you reach even more consumers and be local media stories leading to free publicity and marketing. But, calling on chefs can prove difficult and be surprisingly frustrating if you're not prepared, as chefs are notoriously busy, particular, and even border on finicky. Take a look at my five-step process for building a successful relationship with chefs: 1) preparing; 2) prospecting; 3) managing the appointment; 4) closing; and 5) retaining the customer.

To prepare, you must really understand your own product and how you want to serve the restaurant trade. The biggest issues are how much and how often you have product and what you're long on (ground beef) and short on (tenderloin).

Before you go out and call on restaurants, consider your own limitations, particularly product availability. Then, if you have some

prospects, great; if not, consider reading dining guides, searching for local restaurant associations on the Internet or reading regional magazines. Narrow this group down to a manageable prospect list and then begin to create your message.

Have something that in 30 seconds or less defines who you are, what you're selling and why your beef product is unique and will benefit them. Chefs are always the "what's in it for me?" kind of customer. They have to be; they know their customers and must please them. Likewise, you have to please the chef if you want to serve this niche.

When you begin to prospect, start with referrals. I also believe that cold-calling a chef is okay — I did and ended up with 22 restaurant customers in my first month in business! Most chefs are interested in the "local beef thing"; capitalize on it and make your way to their door.

Always make a first call to chefs when they are least busy such as between 9 and 10:30 a.m. (if they are in) and between 2 and 4 p.m.

Never cold call chefs after 5 p.m. — it may not be pretty! Also, give your spiel, customizing it to each restaurant, if you can, and ask for an appointment to bring in samples. At the end of the call, ask for the receptionist or hostess if you need directions; chefs I've dealt with won't care to be bothered with advising you the best way to find them from your farm.

Once you have an appointment, arrive early. Realize, though, that chefs have a lot, quite literally, on their plates, so don't be surprised if you have to wait or have to present your case while they are chopping onions or making a demi glaze.

Tell your farm's story in interesting and colorful detail, placing special emphasis on why your beef product is special. Once you've captivated them, provide the samples and even ask if they'd like to prepare them while you're there. Marketing material about your farm is also essential.

When it is time to close the deal, make sure you cover the essentials such as talking with the buying

decision maker. Many chefs are also owners, but sometimes you'll need to talk price and quantity with a general manager. Also work out when the first delivery should arrive, who will sign for it and how you'll be paid. Don't forget to ask if they will display your materials on the tables.

Provided the beef speaks for itself, you can retain chefs as loyal customers by following a few quick pointers. First, don't let the first order get messed up, simple as that. Chefs must have their product when they need their product; if you get it to them reliably, that's at least half the battle.

Second, call them back after they've served their first product and ask what the customer reaction was to your beef. Also, you could volunteer to walk through the restaurant and introduce yourself — some chefs will love this idea.

Finally, get to know your chef clients and build a customer profile that you update with their preferences and "regular" orders. Soon you'll be on your way to asking for their referrals. **HW**