

Farm to Fork

Meat merchandisers witness birth to harvest during cattle industry tour.

by Angie Stump Denton



In April, 16 representatives from The Fresh Market, neighborhood specialty grocer, enjoyed a Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC sponsored tour of

Western Kansas, which highlighted the CHB® farm-to-fork process.

Tour participants visited National Beef Packing Co. LLC's Dodge City packing plant, Ford County Feedlot and Sandhill Farms, Haviland. The

Hereford Verified program was demonstrated throughout the tour.

The kick-off event in Wichita was a CHB® dinner and a presentation by the Kansas Beef Council, which included general beef industry and consumer trends information.

"The Fresh Market meat team especially enjoyed the visit with Kevin Schultz at Sandhill Farms," Ross Reynolds, The Fresh Market meat manager, says. "In polling the guys, the tour of the ranch and discussion with Kevin about his trade were definitely the highlights of the trip. Personally I learned more about the breeding and genetics of cattle in one afternoon than I knew combined prior to that. The fact that Kevin specifically breeds Herefords and our being able to witness the birth of a calf made the visit even better."

The Fresh Market was founded on one simple idea: To bring neighbors, family and friends products they can savor and appreciate. The company strives to deliver a shopping experience that is out of the ordinary, and delights and surpasses customer expectations each time they visit. CHB product fits the company's goal, and The Fresh Market has been a CHB retailer since 2003.

The Fresh Market offers both CHB and Choice product in its meat case. According to Reynolds CHB always outsells Choice. He attributes that success to the consistency of the product. "Customers can tell the difference," says Tim Douglas, meat manager from Mobile, Ala. "They ask for Hereford beef."

During the tour CHB LLC staff along with National Beef Packing Co., Ford County Feeders and Kansas Beef Council staff were able to answer questions and discuss concerns with the meat merchandisers. "The biggest misconception from the consumer perspective is growth hormones," Chris Cason, The Fresh Market meat merchandiser, explained. "We get a lot of questions at the meat counter about the use of hormones. Consumers relate that to Barry Bonds. If they understood it was estrogen [as the hormones were explained during the tour] it wouldn't be such a big issue."

Jack Boswell, meat merchandiser, summarized the tour saying, "It was neat to see how all segments work together to produce a better quality product from start to end. We're really a very small part."

The pictures that follow provide a snapshot of the tour. **HW**



The tour group included 16 employees of The Fresh Market, including meat managers and merchandisers. The attendees earned the trip by winning a sales and customer service contest. "At the feedlot you could see the difference of consistency between the crossbreed pens and the Hereford pens," says Chris Cason. "You could see the care and pride Hereford breeders like Kevin have in what they do. They are trying to produce a better product."



The tour started at the boxed-beef end of the beef supply chain and worked backward. At National Beef's Dodge City plant the participants were able to see the entire harvesting process, including carcass grading and fabrication.



Tour attendees learned about beef's "umami" effects during a presentation led by the Kansas Beef Council. Umami plays an important role in making food taste delicious. Umami is a savory taste, which occurs naturally in many foods, including beef. It's the "wow" taste in beef. The demonstration included dipping steak in different sauces to test the umami value.

Attendees saw the lines of workers cutting up carcasses. They also witnessed how ground beef is made and packaged, as shown here.

Fernando Gonzalez, meat manager, from Aventura, Fla., says the tour was an eye-opening experience. "I've spent all my life on the retail side and to now see how it works on this side of the business is amazing."



At Ford County Feedlot the group had a chance to tour the feed mill and drive through the lot to look at different groups of cattle on feed. The lot had several pens of Hereford Verified cattle.



Left and below: A highlight of the tour was visiting Sandhill Farms and meeting with Hereford breeder Kevin Schultz and his family. Kevin shared insight about breeding and genetic selection.



An unplanned event, the group was able to witness the birth of a calf while touring Sandhill Farms. Cow-calf pairs and yearling bulls were among the stock viewed.

About The Fresh Market

The Fresh Market opened its first store in Greensboro, N.C., in 1982. It was the fulfillment of a dream for founders, Ray and Beverly Berry, to provide a unique and wholesome grocery shopping experience. Their goal was to offer customers high-quality perishable products in a warm and friendly atmosphere with a high level of customer service.

Recalling a time when small, local grocers played an integral part of the daily routine of the community, they embarked on a daring adventure.

They decided to become a neighborhood specialty grocer selling wholesome foods at reasonable prices, in an intimate setting. Gone were prepackaged meat, seafood, produce, bakery and deli products. Products were attractively displayed loose and unpackaged, allowing customers to pick and choose which products and how much of each they needed for that shopping trip.

The small size of the store, high degree of customer service and wide selection of fresh products allow many customers to shop almost daily for their food needs, thereby making their mealtime offerings more wholesome and better tasting.

As the word spread about the unique wholesomeness of The Fresh Market, nearby towns started to ask for their very own neighborhood Fresh Market. The company started to grow with additional stores in North Carolina. In 1986 The Fresh Market opened its first store outside of North Carolina in Greenville, S.C. In the early '90s, the company expanded in Tennessee and Georgia. The year 2005 saw expansion into the Midwest with stores in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.

The Fresh Market currently operates more than 59 stores in the Southeast and Midwest, with plans for continued expansion into areas that desire the old-time value of the store in their community.

This family owned, privately-held company is committed to its founding goals: To provide a unique and wholesome shopping experience at a reasonable price and to be a destination for those who enjoy cooking and good eating. For more information about The Fresh Market, visit their Web site at www.freshmarket.com. **HW**

