

Locally Grown

UTAH RANCHERS WHO'VE FOUND THEIR NICHE

By Tamra Watson, Utah's Own Marketing Specialist, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

"Become a possibilitarian. No matter how...things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see possibilities – always see them, for they're always there."

- Norman Vincent Peale

The success of local farms and ranches has always been top of mind for the Marketing & Economic Development Division at the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF). With the competitive marketplace, coupled with an expanding population, agriculturists are facing unique and diverse challenges.

To aid agriculturists in their marketing efforts and exploration, UDAF created Utah's Own, a state program to enable producers with business-to-business networking, resourceful training and credible local branding. In addition, Utah's Own seeks to educate local consumers about the quality local products available.

"Our members remind us often that no effort, training or campaign is worth the investment, until a product goes across a scanner – consumer demand is key," Seth Winterton, program manager of Utah's Own said.

To keep consumers engaged, Utah's Own has created a user friendly listing (utahsown.org) that arms consumers with pertinent information such as business and retail locations, hours and season of operation, as well as nutritional labels and price ranges.

Interestingly enough, Utah and the Intermountain West is full of active consumers seeking to understand agriculture and food production; which in turn opens up new marketing and business opportunities for producers – from direct-to-consumer sales, access to farmers markets and retail, as well as fine dining and restaurants.

Yet, with the buzz around "local", many producers are still baffled by the "how" – like a massive freeway, there are many variables happening simultaneously, at 80 miles per hour.

So, instead of educating about the benefits of local sales and marketing, the following snippets feature a sample of Utah's Own beef producers and their current niche.



RANCH SALES:

Lazy C Beef

After noticing the increased demand for local food, Scott Christensen, from Lazy C Cattle, based

in Centerfield, opted to make his beef available to seeking customers. Noting the demand for both grain-finished and grass-fed beef, he provides both, offering quarter-beef, half-beef and whole portions.

His marketing philosophy was simple:

"I just put a sign on our pasture fence," Christensen said. "And now I get calls from New Mexico, Idaho and California. Most of my customers talk about seeing the beauty of my pastures on the way to the reservoir, and want to support my ranch."

His partnership with the local butcher/packer, South Sanpete Packers, has brought value to both entities. It has also allowed him to provide some hamburger at their local grocery store.

While the local marketing makes up less than one percent of his total sales, Christensen says he enjoys making his beef available to those who want it.

FARMERS MARKET:

BlueTree Cattle Company



With a strong passion for the beef industry, it made sense for West Haven's Bjorn and Shanna Carlson to continue the legacy, with their own unique twist.

"We wanted to get to know our customers," Carlson said, "as well as have a more consistent market."

Marketing locally does take a lot more time preparing for and selling at the farmers markets, but Carlson said it has also increased quality time with his family. They travel together each week from Northern Utah to downtown Salt Lake City.

"The markets promote an enjoyable and family-friendly atmosphere," Carlson said.

He also considers his customers to be great friends – and the testimonials on his website and Facebook pages validate it.

For example Susan wrote, "I was afraid that natural beef would taste different than store-bought beef and my kids wouldn't eat it. It turns out it does taste different, it's a lot better and my kids love it!"



RESTAURANTS:

Pleasant Creek Ranch

From the beginning, the goal of the Jorgensen family was to raise quality cattle, chosen carefully, to ensure an excellent end product.

As a testament, they wrote the following on their homepage: "Our greatest satisfaction comes from hearing direct feedback from those who actually consume our beef."

Pleasant Creek Ranch, nestled in the northern end of the Sanpete Valley, is well-known among chefs and restaurateurs. Trent Jorgensen, ranch owner, said his original marketing plan included upscale dining. In fact, you can find quality reviews from chefs at award-winning restaurants like Copper Onion, Tin Angel Café, The Farm and Promontory.

Yet, Jorgensen said he has discovered the competitive nature of the restaurant industry makes it difficult to provide quality beef at the prices chefs are willing to pay. Such conditions have pushed him to form specific relationships with chefs.

For example, Jorgensen sells the whole beef to Promontory Ranch Club in Park City. As he has worked with Chef Kevin Donovan, they have proven that "ordinary" cuts, prepared well, can be as tasty and useful as the traditional cuts.

The relationship has worked so well with Chef Donovan that Promontory Ranch Club is now producing a YouTube video about the ranch to share with its club members.

Interestingly enough, Pleasant Creek Ranch, has opted not to offer grass-fed beef, despite some consumer trends. "We've done a lot of taste tests with grass-fed beef, head to head, and we have not lost once," Jorgensen said. "The tenderness and marbling produced using our specialized ration is unbeatable."

However, it is not just the care that gives Pleasant

Creek Ranch their niche, it is also their genetics. Originally, the family focused on Wagyu beef. Yet with recent DNA research, Jorgensen said he's confident he can create the same quality using Angus cattle. Such a venture has become a new marketing niche for the family.

"I hope to sell breeding stock, to those looking to break into the local markets," Jorgensen said. He is conducting extension research to ensure the stock will always grade prime. Results are still about two to three years away, but Jorgensen said he's optimistic.

In the meantime, he'll continue to expand his relationships with willing chefs, focus on special events and increase their online sales.

HEALTHY & CONSUMER CONVENIENT:

Fackrell Farms



of Fackrell Farms, based in Morgan, knew his operation was not going to be traditional, he said. "I wanted to make a good piece of meat – healthy, lean and tender – available to all at a reasonable price, even if that person didn't have a ton of freezer space."

To accomplish his goal, Fackrell created consumer-friendly variety packs ranging as small as a 9-pound sample, to a large 42-pound pack (equivalent to about a tenth of a beef). These variety packs have also educated consumers on how to use less-traditional cuts, such as soup bones.

"My meaty soup bones are one of my most popular items," Fackrell said. "It is due to the genetic nature of the Piedmontese breed, I get 12 percent meat on the bone than the traditional Angus."

Beyond his online, direct-to-consumer sales, Fackrell

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has also found success with Health Food Stores. Consumers can find his meat along the Wasatch Front at Good Earth Natural Foods.

Fackrell is passionate about his operation – and his business philosophy. As a rancher, he said he's learned that providing a healthy product starts with healthy lands and animals.

"Don't try to outwit nature," he said "learn to put the science back into raising animals, and it will make life better for all."

GROCERY:

Jones Creek Beef



Wes Crandall, of Springville-based Jones Creek Beef, wanted to raise a product he was proud of that would allow him to help continue his family farm legacy. After conducting some research on consumer trends, he opted to transition part of the family's operation to grass-fed.

"It sounded like a good idea at the time, an opportunity to find our niche, because we all know you can't compete with the big boys," Crandall said.

He often describes the process of talking with retailers as exploring a rabbit hole, with unanticipated twists and turns. After talking, making as many in state retail contacts as he imagined possible, Walmart accepted to meet with him.

"It was the last store we expected to accept us, and it has been one of the best – sure, it has been challenging to meet some of their standards, but we've been able to do it," Crandall said.

They started small, and with increased demand, have enabled other grass-fed beef producers to sell cattle under the Jones Creek Label nationwide. Their business model seeks to keep cattle as close to the consumer as possible, with independent packers in Colorado, Washington, Oregon and California.

Initially, Crandall said he was able to offer producers a larger premium, but with such high prices, the premium has reduced slightly. Even with these conditions, Jones Creek Beef is looking to contract with growers and packers in Texas and Oklahoma.

In addition, Kroger has recently agreed to sell our product, Crandall said. "While it won't be our brand, it will be our grass fed beef, and that's something we can be proud of."

Pride, Possibilities and Profitability – are definitely part of Utah's Own vision to help all farmers and ranchers, like featured above. If you are interested in a free membership, please contact a member of the Utah's Own Team (801) 538-7100 or sign up at utahsown.org.

ADVICE FROM UTAH'S OWN BEEF PRODUCERS:

"Make sure you have a genuine interest in retail business and working with customers and people on a regular basis. It takes a great deal of time, attention and resources to make direct marketing successful."

– Deborah Myrin-Bertanolli, Canyon Meadows Ranch.

"Concentrate on quality and consumer service – it keeps everyone a bit happier."

– Bjorn Carlson, BlueTree Cattle Company

"Don't try to go too fast – you'll end up sacrificing quality and losing your niche – do your homework and understand your business goals and plans."

– Trent Jorgensen, Pleasant Creek Ranch

"Be honest about your growing practices, have integrity and love your animals. It helps to establish consumer credibility."

– Blaine Fackrell, Fackrell Farms

