

Triple A Pork Coming to a retailer near you

The Pork industry in Canada is consolidating to form a national initiative to create a recognized grading system for pork similar to triple A beef. Sounds simple enough you would think, but if it was simple I am sure it would have been done. The challenges pile up fast when you begin to realize the difference between the way pork is slaughtered verses beef. The side is split in half on beef, but not in pork, meaning the eye of the loin is not exposed, thereby making it difficult to visually see the marbling.

The National Pork Producers in the US have developed a series of 10 levels of marbling. It is not yet recognized by the USDA, and there for can not be used to certify a loin as being sufficiently marbled to label as triple A.

There has been much work in the area of ultra sounds as a tool that was thought to be the answer to challenge, but that has not turned out to be the case either. Ultra sound tends to work well on live animals, but yields very little information on a cold carcass. Ultra sound would work fine for producers wanting to see if their animals were able to provide the necessary marbling before slaughter. There is also the issue at the packing plant level of trying to keep up with the speed of your average packing plant line, 2400 sides an hour requires more than existing technologies can keep up with.

It would seem that the simple answer would be to split the loin and expose the eye. That may eventually be the answer, but getting the industry to accept a split loin is a major endeavor, retailers and packers are a very specialized industry that is structured to maximize the efficiencies within the system. A simple change like splitting the loin is a major change in mind set.

That being said, for those who are willing to experiment with a split loin, could potentially benefit from the options provided. A split loin would allow retailers to buy just that portion of the loin they require most. If, for example back ribs are in demand during BBQ season, that portion of the loin could potentially be more profitable. On the other hand if tenderloins are in demand, that portion would be more profitable. Of course the packers would have to adjust pricing to follow suit, which would create some confusion in the beginning, but eventually should work it self out. That is the law of supply and demand.

So where to go from here, Wayne Robertson and Bethany Uttaro from Lacombe Research Center are endeavoring to see where would be the best point on the loin to track marbling in the event that we were able to convince the industry to accept a split pork loin? If the loin was split, we could offer a superior product, one that the industry could develop a brand upon, and one that could drive the industry to give incentives to the producers to build marbling into the carcass. The logical spot would be at the end of the ribs, thereby leaving the back ribs intact. There has been talk of the point at the tenderloin end where that portion is often removed. The question then becomes, how does the marbling at each of these points compare?

The ultimate goal is to come up with a standardized point of measurement, and then using the existing levels developed in the US, convince industry to recognize this as a standardized method for measuring pork marbling. With Lacombe's help we hope to have the research necessary to support the standards developed.