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 Mar. 10, 2012**

## BIG, BAM boost beef demand

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"That lets you deal with a much smaller diameter product and you can cut it easier."

The reduction provides advantages on the plate. It will allow restaurants to market ribeyes at 8 to 10 oz. rather than 12 oz. and will bring the thickness back to a range of 1 to 1.5 inches, he says.

Previous industry trends were to maintain the entire ribeye with the cap muscle intact. But that made for an increasingly larger surface area, and half the thickness of the new cuts.

"We've cut ribeye steaks from the center eye muscle to increase the thickness of the steak. That provides a higher quality eating experience with more tenderness, juiciness and flavor," Polzer says.

In cooking, a thin steak has less water retention capability than the thick cut, Houser says.

"A thicker steak will retain juiciness better and it won't be overcooked as easily," he notes. "Obviously the product quality is going to be better than on a thin-cut item."

### SPLITTING THE STRIP

Strip steaks got an overhaul, too, but it was a simple solution.

"All we do is take the strip loin and literally cut it lengthwise in half," Polzer says. "What you end up with would be two filet-size pieces that then are cut into filet of strip loins."

Much like the reduced ribeye, the strip loin filet makes for smaller portion size while gaining thickness. Popular *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> brand options include medallions from the chateau for two and the split strip.

Polzer says many of the filet cuts are already being created before they reach retail, so they can be given a more attractive cylinder

shape by tying or netting.

At first, consumers wondered how to cook the small-but-thick cuts, Underly says: "A lot of them tended to burn the outside, and the inside was not cooked properly either." NCBA and the Beef Checkoff found an answer by helping retailers teach consumers a skillet-to-oven process.

"You brown the filets on the outside and then stick the pan into the oven where they can finish nice and slow for the right doneness," she says. "We also created some grill methods such as for the petite roast."

### CONSUMER PREFERENCE

Despite a few years in a tough economy, beef purchasing has remained steady.

"We know Americans love to eat beef and they are finding ways to continue to eat beef," Amen says.

The new cuts do their part to help keep costs down. They can be marketed in smaller package sizes, so more consumers can buy beef.

Partly because the new cuts avoid some seam fat, several have been endorsed with the American Heart Association's heart-check mark. "That's basically communicating to consumers that eating beef can be healthy for you," Amen says.

While the BIG and BAM approaches are helping boost beef consumption by marketing new cuts, "demand response will drive how we further innovate the program," he adds. "We'll keep working to meet the needs of consumers by providing options and high-quality beef products."

More information on BAM is available at [www.beefretail.org/beefalternativemerchandising.aspx](http://www.beefretail.org/beefalternativemerchandising.aspx); for BIG details, visit [www.beef-innovationsgroup.com](http://www.beef-innovationsgroup.com); and the CAB consumer website is at [www.certifiedangusbeef.com](http://www.certifiedangusbeef.com). 🐾