

November 29, 2024

Hello Red Devon Enthusiasts,

My name is A.J. O'Neil owner of O'Neil's Quality Devons, located in western Pennsylvania. I have served on the Red Devon USA board of directors for 6 years and now have the honor to serve as President. I have been raising cattle for 12 years and strictly grass finishing for 9 years. Every day is a learning experience for me on my journey to raise the best quality beef in the regenerative context.

I also work at our families' meat market and grocery store O'Neil's Quality Foods, established in 1989. For over 20 years, I have been learning the art of processing beef for retail cuts, merchandising, and developing value-added products. I love furthering my education in the cattle and meat industry equally. Because I maintain the pulse of the commercial meat industry, including beef, pork, chicken, and seafood, it's my plan over the next year to keep you up to date on current trends, in addition to making sure you're informed about ongoing activities of Red Devon USA.

Let's start with the commercial cattle industry. Live cattle prices have been trading around \$1.80 per pound for most of 2024. Commercial processors have been able to keep prices high by controlling the supply that is going to market. They are masters at knowing how to control when and how many cattle are going to slaughter per week, coupled with consumer and market trends. In November I watched choice boneless neck off chuck roll increase over \$2/lb. I have since seen it drop approximately \$1/lb to wholesale customers, but I'm guessing the damage was already done, and many retail outlets will hold their prices high on chuck roasts, chuck delmonicos, chuck steaks, stew meat, and ground chuck. The prices for rib sub-primal and loins have also been drastically increasing to position those cuts higher for the holidays.

Many Red Devon producers are selling freezer beef, and some are selling retail frozen cuts to the consumers. Those of you selling individual cuts likely set your prices based on demand for certain cuts. Many of our producers sell their beef at a premium over conventional beef so they can eliminate that fluctuation in pricing, but that does not mean we can't better understand market trends and use that to our advantage to become more profitable. Producers should consider opportunities during these market demands to possibly trade resources with other like-minded producers to capitalize on demand during certain seasons. Don't lose sight of what the beef industry is doing; it could help give you a competitive advantage over others who become complacent in their routines.

In the last few years, a lot of government grant money and effort has been put forth to support technological advances in the agricultural industry. This is also happening in the meat industry. I recently learned about a method called "Rinse and Chill" from a podcast featuring Bob Campbell, the director of Technical Services at MPSC (Meat Processing Services Corporation), Inc. Rinse and Chill is a method where the animal is stunned and then infused with a pre-chilled isotonic solution (98.5% water and a blend of dextrose, maltose, and sodium phosphates) that will go through the vascular system. This method is intended to make the meat safer, cleaner, higher quality, better tasting, and and more tender. This technology also helps the packer by allowing for more efficient use of water and energy for each pound of meat produced, reduction of food waste and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. My question is how the consumer will react knowing they are now eating meat that has been injected with yet another solution they don't understand?

Another advancement in the meat industry is a method called HPP (High Pressure Processing). Dr. Gary Sullivan from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Dr. Ranjith Ramanathan from Oklahoma State University have been working on this method. High pressure processing has been used in the dairy industry for pasteurization. Dr. Gary Sullivan's focus is on how HPP can be used to control pathogens and improve food safety. Dr. Ramanathan has a significant amount of experience understanding beef color proteins (Myoglobin), PH, and how atmospheric gases affect the color. The two have combined their fields of interest to come up with some very interesting results. They are learning how to identify the PH of a cut of beef, add high pressure to the cut, and improve the color and tenderness of the meat. The high pressure loosens/breaks the bonds in the muscle fibers allowing more oxygen

around each color protein to enhance a brighter red color and improve tenderness. This is a significant breakthrough for large corporate meat packers, as well as for the farmer that gets heavily discounted due to dark cutting animals. It is estimated to be about \$25-\$30 per hundred weight. Animals that would not get a high grading because of dark cutting may soon have the opportunity to undergo this process. The meat would have no noticeable defects and be more tender. I'm not sure this technology will ever be affordable for small meat processing facilities.

I enjoy learning about the science of how things work and how they can be improved, but I also know my customers. Like many of yours, my customers trust me to give them the best cuts of beef from animals raised and slaughtered in the most humane conditions, in a way that's also beneficial for the environment. When my customers buy from me, they know that I have educated myself and sourced the best quality cattle I can find. They know I'm not going to cut corners and that I will always strive to offer them the best possible eating experience. This mentality positions us differently than the commercial cattle market.

While the industry ultimately impacts cattle prices, the model of direct marketing to a small customer base allows us both flexibility and stability. Some Red Devon cattle producers are not interested in direct marketing beef, while others prefer to focus solely on maintaining a finishing herd rather than operating a cow-calf operation. There's a way we can help each other. If your preference is a cow calf operation, consider connecting with someone who is direct marketing Red Devon beef rather than sending your feeders and stockers to a livestock barn sale. Let's have a discussion and work together to promote the outstanding beef we know Red Devons produce.

I also want you to know what your breed organization is doing for you. We recently revised our mission statement to better clarify our goals. Our new statement will appear on the homepage of our updated website soon. Because that is still in progress, a copy is enclosed for your reference.

Generally, our goals are: 1. Support and Recruit Members; 2. Promotion of the Breed; and 3. Maintain Breed Purity. This looks simple from the outside but has many layers as you peel it back. If you think your strengths could help us in these ways, please reach out to any of our board members or our committee chairs to find out how you can be involved.

Another recent action taken by our board is to encourage everyone to take advantage of the "auto renew" feature on our website for payment of annual membership fees. This year those who choose the auto renew will receive a \$10 discount.

I also want to give a warm welcome to Amber Hines of Hines Clan Farm in Maine. Amber and her husband Derek have been very involved with the organization over the last few years supporting us at many events. During our webinar series I would always see both watching and listening intently. I am glad to have her support and leadership on the board for the next 3 years.

Lastly, I have attached two recipes to share with your customers and friends so they can prepare a wonderful meal with Devon beef for the holidays. I wish you all a wonderful and safe holiday season.

Please reach out to me or any of our board members with your thoughts, suggestions or questions.

Good wishes,

A. J. O'Neil, President

Enclosures:
Red Devon USA Mission Statement
Recipes