



Argentine beef is derived from pedigree Angus and Hereford cattle descended from herds brought from Britain in the 1800s

## PRIME BEEF FROM THE SUNNY GRASSLANDS

**Argentine beef has** been making a name for itself in Europe and the UK. This is undoubtedly due to the flavour and texture of the meat, which is derived from pedigree Angus and Hereford cattle breeds descended from herds brought from Britain in the 1800s. The Argentines claim that their meat is lower in cholesterol than any other beef and 25% lower in fat than most. They attribute this to the fact their cattle live a totally free-range existence, grazing lazily across the sunny grasslands of the pampas, which stretch from horizon to horizon.

All Argentine beef is fully traceable. Stringent controls operate throughout the beef chain with very strict transportation, while slaughtering regulations ensure the maintenance of animal welfare standards. The beef comes only from young steers. It is hung between four to six weeks, then vacuum-packed in chilled containers. There are 97 meatpackers accredited by the EU in Argentina. From these establishments, the cuts are transported to Argentine ports to be shipped to Europe.

**The Argentine beef** industry produces 3m tonnes of meat a year. The bulk is for the domestic market: Argentines consume more meat per head than any other country. The remainder, between 15% and 20%, is exported abroad. The Argentine government has fixed a quota of 40,000t cwe to be exported a month during 2007. Therefore, the total export for 2007 could be estimated as being 480,000t cwe. "Analysing the data, we found that exports

of high quality beef cuts (such as tenderloin, striploin, cube roll, rump and rump cap) were about 100,000 to 105,000t cwe, showing a very similar level during the past three years, even though the amount of refrigerated beef exported has varied between 484,000, 622,000 and 435,000t respectively for the same period," says Dardo Chiesa, president of the Argentine Beef Promotion Institute (ABPI). "These figures show that despite political measures, the volume of high quality beef exports hasn't modified significantly, allowing us to confirm that during 2007 exports will remain at the same level."

**While Russia remains** the prime destination for Argentine beef, the EU is the second most important market. Within the EU, Germany is the favoured destination, receiving 27,000t and the UK 5,500t. Only cuts taken from the muscular rear of the animal are seen in the UK.

Currently 80% of all Argentine beef imported into the UK is sold into the top end catering trade, but the ABPI's key objective this year is to drive distribution across the board – including the retail trade – and ultimately create awareness and demand from consumers. At present, Tesco is the only UK retailer supplied by Argentina.

The Argentine producers have the advantage of being able to produce beef for British tables much more cheaply than comparable domestic cuts. "The UK is a very important market for us. We would position ourselves as an option, complementing the British and Irish offering.

We believe we can achieve this, as the taste and heritage of our beef is British," says Chiesa.

The first promotion of Argentine beef in Britain was launched at IFE in March and was followed subsequently by an Argentine Beef Day in May, where chefs demonstrated how the South American beef could be adapted to British cuisine. It was also promoted at the Royal Welsh Show. Further promotions are planned at Anuga and the World Food Exhibition in Moscow.

The Argentines, aware that the environment and carbon miles are firmly on the consumer agenda, point out that their beef is shipped in containers taking 21–25 days, depending on the port of destination. Since presentation is fundamental, the cuts are vacuum-packed.

**While the Argentines** see the halting of beef exports last year as a sign of confidence, the Meat & Livestock Commission believes continuing government interference is showing the opposite. In its MLC Economics' International Meat Market Review, June 2007, it writes: "The recent agreement between government and industry has been signed by some farmers' unions, but not all. The agreement is supposed to replace livestock price controls with controls on wholesale and retail prices, and in return the government is supposed to provide funds to boost the cattle herd."

The MLC forecasts that continuing export restrictions mean Argentine beef production in 2007 will rise by 2% and exports by 3%.