

## BEDROCK'S STRONG CONSUMER RESPONSE

Access to a variety of top quality Wagyu beef has provided a valuable extension to an already impressive beef product range for a successful large-scale South East Qld wholesale/retail meat business.

Kris Masterson and his family operate Bedrock Gourmet Meat Company based at Loganholme and Yatala in the booming corridor between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. While the largest part of their business concentrates on wholesaling meat to the upper end of the restaurant and food service industry from the Yatala premises, there is also an impressive large-scale retail butchery outlet at nearby Loganholme.

The food service side of the business handles major accounts including Brisbane's massive Convention Centre and Parliament House, through to large hotel groups on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts such as the Marriott and Hyatt chains. At the other end of the scale, the client list includes hundreds of smaller-scale restaurants and bistros. In the Loganholme retail outlet, Bedrock offers an incredible range of product, to suit a wide customer demographic.

"We stock a selection of more than ten rib fillets, for example, ranging in price from \$50/kg for top end Wagyu down to \$7/kg," Kris said. "Customers today love to have a choice. Gone are the

days where a rib fillet was just another rib fillet."

Kris said the business started adding Wagyu to its product range three and a half years ago, partly due to growing customer inquiry.

"Originally we could only get it from one supplier, but both the product quality and the access to it was fairly inconsistent," he said.

**UNLIKE SOME AUSTRALIAN RETAILERS WHO HAVE FOUND THE MORE EXTREME HIGH MARBLING SCORES ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN DOMESTIC MARKET'S TASTE, BEDROCK IS HAPPY TO STOCK 7-8 SCORE WAGYU SLICED PRODUCT, AND EVEN HIGHER.**

"Today there is a much wider range of suppliers we can source from, and much of the inconsistency issues have been ironed-out. For a while we were seeing some irregularity in marbling score, but that has also improved a lot," he said.

Customers are now flocking after Wagyu beef through the business.

"The product carries not only unbelievable tenderness, but also that characteristic juiciness and flavour, which

more and more customers now recognise."

Kris said the Wagyu side of the business had grown from nothing to between 15 and 20 percent of the turnover – a considerable amount of beef, in the context of the business's overall size.

In the retail shop, there is a distinct difference in price-point between the Wagyu

offering – particularly the more heavily marbled material – and the conventional beef ranging from MSA yearling through to longfled Black Angus.

"Once customers have tried some Wagyu, they are happy to pay that premium for a product that eats so well – not every day, necessarily, but when the occasion demands," Kris said.

He said much of the past three years had been about trying to educate Bedrock's



customers about the qualities of Wagyu, because it is so different from conventional beef. The retail site stocks a wide variety of brands, both in sliced cuts in the chilled cabinet, and whole primal vacuum-packed beef.

On the day of Wagyu Update's visit to the site, within the Wagyu category alone, there were examples of Stanbroke Wagyu, Pure Blue, Cabassi & Rea and AA Co's Kobe Cuisine. Jack's Creek and Security Foods are also regularly used brands. In addition to sliced and whole primal muscle meat, there is an extensive range of value-added products like Wagyu burgers, corned silverside, mince and kebabs.

Unlike some Australian retailers who have found the more extreme high marbling scores are not necessary for the Australian domestic market's taste, Bedrock is happy to stock 7-8 score Wagyu sliced product, and even higher.

"If we are going to display a tray of Wagyu striploin next to a tray of quality yearling striploin, it needs to have that distinctly different appearance for contrast. So in some cases we are happy to chase the higher scores," Kris said.

Bedrock has also established a system where it contacts a group of 'known Wagyu-loving customers' by phone or email when access is available to some extreme score 9+ product.

"It can be very hard to source at times on the domestic market, but if we can get a couple of boxes of score 10 or 12 rib fillets, for example, we will send out the word and sell them as whole primals, in no-time. Many of those customers say they do not care what the price is – 'just keep me some', they ask."

"We find it is better to handle that extreme high marbling (and high value) product in that way, rather than to slice it and put in on a tray in the window and try to sell it in dribs and drabs."

Increasingly, Wagyu is also

finding a place in the wholesale and portioning side of the Bedrock business – particularly in the upper end of the trade – which constitutes more than 90 percent of the overall company turnover. Asked whether Bedrock's portion control business (slicing and preparing whole primals into meal serve

sizes, within accurate weight and thickness tolerances – mostly for restaurants and hotels) tended to reduce average serve size when cutting Wagyu because it was so rich, Kris said that tended to apply only with the higher marbled product – the balance was cut to conventional dimensions. ■

### LESSONS IN JAPAN VISIT

**Bedrock co-proprietor Kris Masterson recently visited Japan on holiday, and was intrigued to see how Japanese butchers approached the business of breaking down a body of beef and presenting the material in retail form.**

"We saw lots of evidence of slicing cuts paper-thin, to suit a whole range of traditional Japanese cooking styles," he said.

"There was a great deal of effort put into cuts preparation, and it was just such a contrast to what we do in Australia, with much bigger, thicker portion sizes. Sixty percent of my customers ask for a steak to be cut an inch thick or more, but you rarely see that on display in Tokyo."

Kris thought there could be an opportunity to develop some Japanese style prepared lines of Wagyu beef for sale through the Bedrock business.

"There are lots of small Japanese and Asian restaurants, and even Japanese retail customers living on the Gold Coast and Brisbane, who we could target for those types of specialised products. We already do a lot of wholesale work in whole primal meat with Japanese restaurants, so it would be an extension of that work," he said.

"I bought a 40 gram Wagyu cocktail kebab while I was in Japan – it cost me 900 Yen (about \$9 Australian),

so unfortunately I did not get to eat a lot of the local product while I was there," he joked.

If there was an area for the Australian Wagyu industry to consider in terms of improvement, Kris thought it was in brand programs providing more point-of-sale material to better promote Wagyu and provide information for the customer, and in improving packaging and description for whole primals.

"Making the product look more appealing in the cryovac bag, and using easy-to-understand references to marbling content (like those used by Cabassi & Rea and Pure Blue) would help the consumer in the selection process," he said.

"Cryovac vacuum packaging does not look good at the best of times. Why not move away from clear bags to different coloured opaque bags, attractively labelled for each of the marbling groups?" he suggested.

Readers can check out the Bedrock website which features a strong Wagyu presence at [www.bedrockmeat.com.au](http://www.bedrockmeat.com.au) ■

**ABOVE** Part of the large self-serve selection of Wagyu vacuum-packed primals on offer in the Bedrock shop, including Stanbroke Diamantina Wagyu and Pure Blue. **RIGHT** Bedrock's Kris Masterson with a tray of sliced Kobe 708 marbling score 7-8 Wagyu in front of his business's retail outlet display.