



Building a Customer Base: A Local Belgian Blue Story

Belgian Blue beef is rare in the United States, but a local producer is shining the light on this unique breed. Didier Vanderbiest, a veterinarian from Belgium, has a deep love for these cattle and is educating others on this distinctive breed. In 2017, Didier began looking for a producer in the Midwest to partner with. In 2020, he began working with Brian Schumann, an Iowa farmer. Through this partnership, Didier was able to begin raising his cattle. Belgian Blue cattle produce very lean and tender meat. For those who prefer leaner beef, these cattle can exceed your standards. Since this is a niche market for the area, gaining customers can be challenging, but Didier's passion for this breed has helped him take the right steps to creating a customer base.



The team at Nordik Meats working with Belgian Butcher, Sylvain

To help sell beef to local chefs, Didier visits restaurants in the area and gives out samples for the chefs to try. Believing in his product, Didier awaits calls and emails from the chefs who want to add Belgian Blue beef to their menus. Once an interested chef contacts him, they arrange what cuts of meat they will order and in what form. For example, an order Didier recently filled included four whole tenderloin, one brisket, forty ribeye, and forty 12 oz. ounce boneless short ribs.

To create a customer base, Didier completed a few key steps: identified a need, created connections, and followed through. First off, Didier noticed that some chefs and other consumers are looking for leaner beef, but still want a quality-eating experience. After identifying this need and ensuring he had the resources

to fill it, he began making connections. Didier gave out small samples of his beef for chefs to experiment with and try themselves. Since Belgian Blue beef is not common in this area, allowing chefs to try it out and see what Didier has to offer is a must.

The last and most important step is following through. After the chefs had placed their order, Didier fulfilled it. Although this sounds incredibly simple, this



Belgian Blue burger patties

step can often be overlooked when live cattle prices are high. Following through once an order is placed builds trust with customers. Once this is established, producers and consumers can count on each other.

Didier also sells direct-to-consumer. He advertises to consumers who value hormone-free, extra lean, and grass-fed beef via the Belgian Blue Beef LLC Facebook page. With a slogan of "farm-to-fork," he continues to make reach and complete orders, like when he sells to restaurants.



Belgian Blue New York Strip

A key component of selling meat to customers is maintaining a great working relationship with a processor. "To achieve a perfect product, I had the opportunity to work in perfect harmony with a local slaughterhouse. USDA certification was essential," Didier said. "When I presented my request to the head of

Nordik Meats, he was immediately won over by my project. He quickly agreed to collaborate, and the result was exceptional. He even accepted the idea of bringing in a Belgian butcher to make a perfect cut." Through open communication, Didier and Nordik Meats work together to correctly fulfill every order placed. Without this positive connection, it would be difficult for Didier to sell beef.



Didier (left) and Sylvain (right) with a Belgian Blue carcass

Didier has created many lasting relationships that allow him to find success. Creating these connections can be a game changer for anyone looking to get into or expand their beef business. For more information on raising beef cattle or direct marketing beef, contact a UW-Madison Division of Extension Livestock Educator or Beef Specialist near you.

Thank you to Nordik Meats and Didier for allowing me to highlight your work in this article!

Please note that UW-Madison Division of Extension does not endorse any specific cattle breed or type of beef. We support what fits you and your operation.