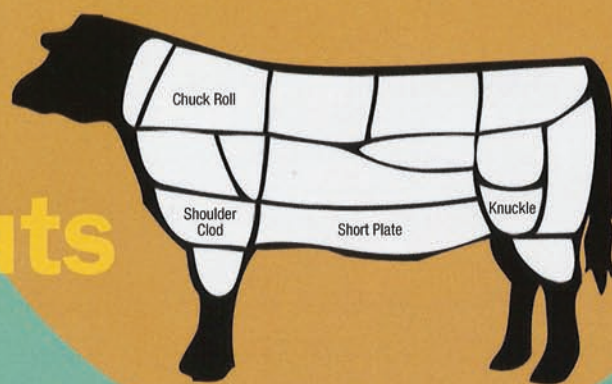


Uncommon Cuts But The Umami Never Diminishes



If you are used to premium cuts like rib eye, porterhouse and T-bone steak, would you know your beef chuck roll from your shoulder clod? Read on to discover why it pays to take the beef path less taken

Known as secondary cuts, conspiracy theorists would argue that the term is made up by early butchers to keep societies elite away from the tastiest cuts of meat. Not many consumers are aware of these alternative meat products but these inexpensive beef cuts should not be overlooked as they can have all the characteristics that customers want: tenderness, juiciness and flavour, so long as they are not overcooked. Secondary cuts when cooked well are just as tasty as premium cuts.

With beef prices increasing for years, it has never been more important for consumers to start being a bit more adventurous with their cooking by trying uncommon cuts of meat. These secondary cuts can be 30 per cent cheaper than the traditional varieties of beef available in supermarkets. At Huber's Butchery, a one-stop shop at Dempsey for quality meats and gourmet groceries, the price for alternative cuts of Toriyama Wagyu is \$148/kg as compared to \$309/kg for premium cuts of this Japanese beef from the Gunma prefecture.

Contrary to popular belief, chefs and restaurateurs are not using them in an effort to cut costs (although that is an added benefit) – the key driver is taste. Many believe lesser-known cuts are more flavourful than their primary counterparts. That is why these secondary cuts can be a first choice option for some chefs and restaurants.

Furthermore, if a whole cow from nose to tail can be consumed, its value will be increased while reducing a huge amount of waste. And with foodies now being more knowledgeable than they used to be, they are prepared to try new things.

UMAMI IN BEEF

Umami makes beef tastes better. Beef is high in umami because it possesses three natural sources of umami: glutamic acid (an amino acid), salts of glutamic acid (called glutamates) and nucleotides. These naturally occurring compounds produce beef's umami taste.

In Wagyu, the juiciness of the fat depends on the percentage of oleic acid in the total fat content – the higher the percentage, the juicier the fat. On the other hand, the higher the amount of amino acids in the meat, the beefier the meat tastes.

TORIYAMA WAGYU – MARBLING WITH UMAMI

Founded in 1948, the Toriyama Company differentiates itself from the rest of the Wagyu producers and marketers in Japan with its establishment of a new umami standard for Wagyu meat to complement the beef marbling standard. Cattle genetics producing meat with high umami scores are identified using a device that can quantify the umami in the meat. The farm can then control the bloodline to guarantee a consistent supply of delicious beef with high umami levels.

In other words, Toriyama Wagyu has high amino acids while retaining their high oleic acid. Overflowing with quality amino acids and unsaturated fats, the meat also emits a sweet, coconut-like beef aroma with each chew.

Most other Wagyu has more oleic acid than amino acids, therefore giving you that melt-in-your-mouth texture but can sometimes lack flavour. Whereas in a Toriyama Wagyu, you will savour tender, juicy meat finely balanced



Toriyama Wagyu chuck roll to be used for the waza-sukiyaki.



The waza-sukiyaki.



Preparing the saikyo isobeyaki with Toriyama Wagyu short plate.

with intricate marbling of high-quality fat that literally melts in the mouth. Hence, marbling with umami has proven to be the unique selling point for Toriyama Wagyu which is graded based on its umami levels. Toriyama Wagyu finding favour with several top dining establishments in Singapore, such as Ki-sho, Corner House and Tippling Club, attest to the high quality of the beef.

COOKING WITH UNCOMMON CUTS

A satisfying beef-eating experience is matching the cooking method to the cut, which helps maximise umami. Cuts from muscles that have been subjected to more exercise tend to have more umami. Cuts like chuck and brisket are well-exercised muscles on an animal and have more natural umami, but they tend to require slow cooking because they are not as tender.

The chuck has plenty of connective tissues that melt when the meat is cooked. This helps to add flavour and also helps to tenderise the meat. Although chuck cuts are flavourful, they are not as tender as the loin and rib cuts. They can become rather tough if not cooked properly. Cuts from the chuck benefit from slow cooking using moist heat methods such as braising.

In contrast, cuts from less-exercised muscles, such as filet mignon, have less natural umami. So to bring out the umami in filet mignon, you need to sear it and pair it with another umami-rich ingredient, such as a mushroom sauce.

However, secondary cuts do not have to be all about slow braising and hearty casseroles. When handled with skill, the flavour profile, texture and end product is something that can be very impressive.

To show that the beef chuck does not have to be limited to curries and casseroles, chef Kazuki Arai of banquet restaurant White In Takasaki was recently on hand at Huber's Butchery to demonstrate the clean beefy flavour of the Toriyama Wagyu chuck roll. His restaurant in Gunma prefecture is known for using a variety of the prefecture's seasonal produce for its dishes. Recreating his restaurant's speciality hotpot – the waza-sukiyaki, the chef showcased the succulent umami from the richly marbled chuck roll where its flavour is best enjoyed in thin slices.

At the Gourmet Studio of Huber's Butchery, the experienced chef also showcased three other secondary cuts, such as the short plate, knuckle and shoulder clod, in three Japanese dishes. The short plate has alternating layers of lean meat and fat with a rich flavour. It is usually used for yakiniku (barbecues). Both the shoulder clod and knuckle are lean and tender with the former having a sweet juicy flavour that is unique to Wagyu. The rich flavoured knuckle produces a good amount of gelatin when cooked.

There was no stopping the resulting oohs and aahs as food tasters savoured chef Arai's exquisite creations, thereby reaffirming the conspiracy theory that secondary cuts is just a term made up to keep less-discerning consumers away from the tastiest cuts of meat. Without sacrificing flavour or dining pleasure, these lesser-known cuts open up a range of options that take advantage of the other 535kg of a 545kg steer, often with a price advantage.