

Branded Beef

WHAT IT IS

More and more beef in the supermarket carries a brand name on the package. Branding beef, as for other products, delivers a promise to the consumer. For beef, that promise comes in the form of attributes such as consistency in taste, tenderness, juiciness and flavor. Every Branded Beef program is unique. Most have specifications around grade, aging and size, and they may offer some kind of satisfaction guarantee. In general, there are three categories of Branded Beef.

- **“Breed specific” Branded Beef** – This type of Branded Beef chooses cattle from a specific breed. For example, Kobe beef refers to beef from Wagyu cattle raised in the Kobe region of Japan.
- **“Company specific” Branded Beef** – This type of branded program chooses beef from all types of breeds but includes other criteria in terms of grade, marbling, size, types of feed used and/or restrictions on the use of pesticides, antibiotics and growth hormones. Examples would include the Sterling Silver™ Beef program or Maverick Ranch.
- **“Store branded” Branded Beef** – Some grocery store chains are now branding their beef. For example, King Soopers and City Markets in Colorado carry “Cattlemen’s Collection” fresh beef, produced exclusively for those divisions of Kroger by the Excel Corporation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What does it mean when a brand is “certified”?**

When the word “certified” appears in the brand name, it means that the specifications such as breed or marbling scores are monitored and verified by an impartial third party such as the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) or the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). This certification helps ensure product consistency.

- **Why do some brands include the word “natural”?**

Beef that is labeled “natural” is most likely from companies that are marketing Natural Beef but are emphasizing restrictions on types of feed and/or the use of pesticides, antibiotics and growth hormones. All fresh beef is natural according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition of Natural Beef as “minimally processed containing no additives.” All fresh beef found in the meat case that does not have an ingredient label (a label is added if the product includes a marinade or solution) is Natural.

-more-

- **What is the difference between Wagyu cattle and Kobe Beef?**

The word “Wagyu” refers to all Japanese beef cattle. ‘Wa’ means Japanese or Japanese-style and ‘gyu’ means cattle. There are two main Wagyu breed types, black and red, and several strains of each. Kobe refers to beef from cattle raised in the Kobe region of Japan. Japan’s rugged terrain created isolated pockets in which different breeding and feeding techniques were used. This resulted in distinctly different characteristics of the beef, notably the intensity of the marbling which produces a very rich taste.

Wagyu is the breed that yields Kobe Beef. However, to earn the title of Kobe Beef, the cattle must be raised in the specific Kobe region of Japan. To meet the growing demand for this type of beef, Wagyu cattle are now raised in the U.S. Wagyu cattle were first introduced to the U.S. in 1976. American Wagyu producers claim little difference between Japanese Kobe and American-raised Wagyu in terms of quality, taste and texture. One point of difference is that American-raised Wagyu are not usually raised using legendary Kobe-style methods such as being fed beer to stimulate the appetite, being massaged to relieve stress and muscle stiffness or being brushed with sake.

- **How does Branded Beef differ from unbranded beef?**

Branded Beef carries a specific brand name on the beef label and meets the unique set of specifications set by the branding company. Unbranded beef is USDA-approved and simply carries the generic name of the beef cut on the label.

- **Can any beef be branded?**

Any beef can be branded if it meets the specifications of a company’s branding program. For specific information, consumers should contact specific manufacturers.

- **What beef grades can be branded?**

Branded Beef can include the USDA quality grades of beef – Select, Choice and Prime. In the case of Wagyu beef, it is often graded using the Japanese grading system that includes evaluation for marbling scores from 1 to 12. American-raised Wagyu typically scores between 5 and 8 on this scale as compared to normal USDA Prime Cuts which range from 3+ to 4.

Sources for Purchasing Branded Beef

Most branded beef can be found anywhere beef is sold. Particular brands may not be available nationwide; however, often they can be ordered via the company’s Web site.