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Dry Age Meat,**v2 2016**

The art of getting the most out of meat.

For centuries people have been drying meat in order to prolong its storage life. Nowadays we still use this old technique so as to get to a significant improvement in taste. In the modern Dry Age process both the ripening of the meat and the durability are of major importance. As a matter of fact, we need a longer durability in order to obtain a sufficient ripening time.

Dry Age stems from a time when there were still large herds of buffaloes grazing on the prairies. The animals that were shot were severed into big technical parts and transported to the big cities in unchilled steam train wagons. It was discovered that, by taking out certain planks from the wagon and letting in a sufficient mass of air stream into the wagon, the meat would turn black but stayed wonderfully red inside. Moreover, it didn't perish and the taste became more tender and much more flavoursome. Even old-fashioned butchers were impressed by this modern-day process although it was applied with varying degrees of success in those days.

So, you will understand that we have tried, tested and further developed this old know-how and adapted it to our present-day needs. In doing so we focussed solely on beef.

The Dry Age system developed by us gives the best possible results ever obtained so far. One of the biggest advantages is its dynamic operating system: it is capable of making a pretty accurate estimate of the quantity of meat to be dried and the stages of the ripening process inside the cabinet. After that, in steps and stages, the process can either be speeded up or slowed down. In this way it is possible to place both fresh meat and meat in various stages of ripening in one and the same cabinet.

All our Dry Age cabinets are partly or completely see-through. You can perfectly witness the changes in the meat and bring these quality products to the attention of your customers and guests. People are usually greatly interested and have a lot of questions to ask. So our Dry Age cabinets are quite an eye-catcher as well!

What happens in our Dry Age cabinet is this:

The temperature fluctuates. This is a typical characteristic but the temperature never exceeds 6.2 degrees Celsius and we therefore remain below the legal maximum storage temperature.

The temperature regularly rises (has to rise) in order for the lactate enzymes to break down the walls of the cells because this stops when the temperature stays too low.

We also keep an eye on how fast the relative humidity rises during the process. The speed with which this happens is dependent on the quality of the meat in the cabinet. A rapid rise

indicates fresh meat.

We also use the cooling system to artificially reduce the air humidity in the cabinet.

In relatively dry air bacteria can hardly survive, even fungi or mould don't get a chance to grow. This is actually the main reason why there is no decay of the meat.

In addition, the reaction of the meat itself plays a large role here. The outside dries up and gets a dark colour, where even a white layer of wax will be seen to develop.

The outer layer or skin of the meat shrinks because of the drying process. Fat in the underlying cells is pushed out as it were, which explains the white layer of wax. We could now speak of a dry vacuum. The interior has now been shut off from the outside world which may harm it by a tough dark outer layer of skin (the so-called Dry Age skin).

Now, time and lactate enzymes do their work; because the lactate enzymes attack the tougher cell walls the meat becomes more tender and also the taste becomes better.

From this moment on it is just the same as with wine: the length of time we allow it to ripen determines the result - but that's entirely up to you; personally, I would say 20 to 30 days. Longer is quite possible. Longer ripening gives a somewhat nut-like and by some people very appreciated taste, certainly along the edges. Obvious advice would be not to cut or trim too much off the Dry Age skins.

At one time we tried drying for 200 days! The result was remarkable: beautiful poppy-red meat, good taste, the texture spreadable. Because of the fact that there was no cell structure present anymore it had become meat paste. But still splendidly colourful and of good taste.

Dehydration - a subject that many a butcher tries to point out to me. And so they say: dehydration equals loss of money. Which is true in itself but still I would like to convince you of the contrary. Dehydration can get as much as 30% but stops at that level. A Dry Age steak will immediately be sealed on the outside when done properly, thanks to it being dehydrated, and cause its sugars to be caramelised and stay red on the inside without losing their juices when hand-sliced by chef. A fresh steak, however, will first start to simmer and give off steam because the juices will have to vaporise first before the temperature can go up. As far as the weight of fresh and Dry Age meat is concerned, this will be the same at the end considering the fact that dehydration takes place at an other moment (in the process).

Pay attention to:

Only meat of good quality will disclose all of its hidden flavour range. Mind you: good quality can become great quality, but bad quality can never become good quality.

Work clean and boil the hooks. Do not touch the part of the hook that goes into the meat.

Make sure the meat hangs free. Air must be able to circle around it freely. Hanging the meat has our utmost preference. Should you wish to present the meat in a lying position, be sure to enquire after our special meat racks; these guarantee the least possible disruptions.

Meat shouldn't touch other meat; this hinders the air stream and gives wet stains vulnerable to decay.

Now it's a matter of waiting for the best results. I should also mention that you could make use of so-called pre-Dry Age meat in order to obtain the desired production volume.

Dry Age meat has a lovely, characteristic odour; learn to recognise this by putting your nose into the Dry Age cabinet regularly.

Dry Age meat is rather hygroscopic which is the reason why it cannot be kept in a mixed cooling system: it will immediately absorb all the different flavours and odours from other products. And we don't want that, do we?

Do pay attention to cleaning the Dry Age cabinet properly. Do not use any detergents or just a minimal bit at the most. Beware of window cleaners: contamination of flavours is done before you know it.

Maintain your Dry Age cabinet by cleaning the condensor regularly.

Let me give you one more tip:

Do not cut off too much, it's not just a waste as far as its weight is concerned but certainly also its taste! Even the somewhat tougher Dry Age skin regenerates itself during the preparation process.

By telling you this story I hope I've been able to provide you with enough knowledge about a wonderful product with added value and to contribute to your business results.

Should you have questions or remarks or anecdotes or other interesting tales concerning 'Dry Age', please let us know.

I wish you wonderful Dry Age results!

Aad van Weel

