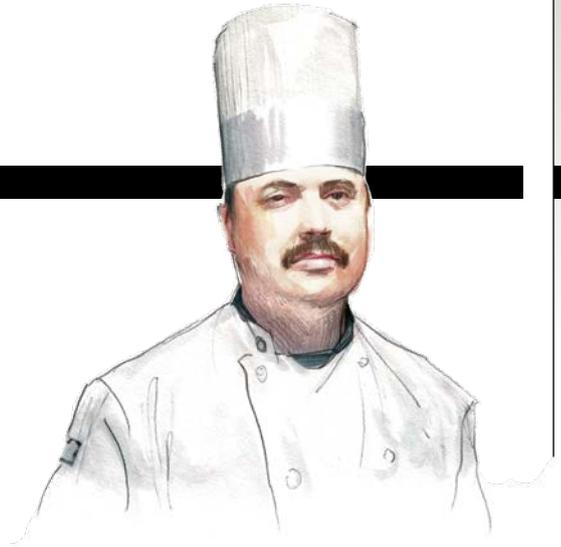


Bringing it home

Associate FCSI member **John Reed** discusses how implementing a dry-age beef programme can deliver quality



With the resurgence of nose to tail culinary philosophies and operators wanting to bring more processes in-house, a dry-ageing programme is one way to put the highest quality product on the table. As designers we must work diligently to maximise space and create a plan that will effectively incorporate a culinary process such as this in the design. If a client wants to dry age beef in house how do you approach this? You need to understand the reasons why first.

The four predominant factors for serving a dry-aged product are:

- **Market differentiation** from a higher operating intelligence expressed through programmes such as in-house dry ageing
- **Culinary differentiator** in internalising production and fabrication for higher quality
- **Dedication to sustainable purchasing** dictating minimally processed products such as primal cuts versus boxed beef
- **Consumer demands** for improved taste and the emotional satisfaction of ordering from a menu that has a documented path from farm to table.

The design of a dry-age room is relatively simple. It is a freestanding walk-in or refrigerated room, which can be continually monitored and accessed by staff and meets the following criteria:

- Designed for the sole purpose of dry-aging
- Easily cleaned, with removable shelving with non-porous surfaces

- Adequate airflow of 15-20 linear feet per minute at the product surface
- Controlled temperature of 34-36°F
- Controlled relative humidity of 85% to 90%
- Specialised 24-hour UV lighting along with fluorescent working lights.

The size of the space depends on product demand and how long the customer prefers to age their product. Generally dry aging can be from 14-60 days depending on the culinary team's wishes. Other determining factors are:

- The size of the primal cuts being aged
- Shelf spacing to maintain two inches of airflow around each cut
- Floor space for staff for daily maintenance and operations
- Preventative measures to ensure no drastic jumps in air temperatures during maintenance and restocking.

I am sure most designers can do the basic calculations to determine an adequate sized cooler for the needs of a particular operation. However, other design considerations need to be discussed. Most of these are centred on the daily operation of managing the programme. Additional design functions that need to be considered are as follows:

- Refrigerated receiving and pre-post fabrication facilities
- Specialised equipment such as scales, meat saws, butchering tables
- Additional refrigerated storage for inedible trim created from fabrication,

if a composting programming is in place

- Location of the space to maximise marketing potential or display a skilled culinary process
- Remote monitoring systems for the environmental systems.

From a MAS perspective we also need to consider the financial aspects of lower yields and higher ingredient costs and what consumers will be willing to pay. Such a programme calls for additional skilled labour to manage and fabricate the product. We need to look at additional monitoring and food safety procedures and liability for increased risk of food safety issues associated from improper management. Possible ROI advantages or disadvantages of initialising the programme from capitalisation cost to the time the first products are delivered to the guest must also be thought about. Finally we must take into account the learning curve of operational staff as well as consumers understanding and embracing this differentiator on the menu.

If all of this can be worked out then it is possible to implement a programme. However the one core value of the programme that must always adhered to is impeccable sanitation. This doing it all in house mentality is here to stay and we need to provide the best facility and operational consultation as possible. ■

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