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The steakhouse: Dark wood, white tablecloths, mouthwatering cuts of beef and, of course, patrons with plenty of money to spend on only the best.

Part of it's the glitz, part the celebratory atmosphere, but mostly it's the expectation of

a rich, filling meal that holds appeal to diners.

No wonder they're so easy to talk about as the target of all targets for cattlemen. Who wouldn't want their beef to end up as the crème de la crème, showcased where only the best of the world's highest-quality beef is served?

Perhaps it's this fascination with the steakhouse, or it could be the way we talk about the filet mignons, New York strips or prime ribs like they're the ultimate test of beef greatness. Whatever the cause, somehow folks are often led to believe that's the only place quality matters.

We sometimes hear the comments that high-quality standards and premium branded beef programs are great for selling the middle meats. But we have to market the whole animal in this business, and when it comes to end meats, grade just doesn't make much difference.

That kind of thinking is at least a convenient denial where grade is lacking in cattle. Moreover, it's a disservice to the entire beef industry. Quality matters on everything from steaks to roasts to hamburger, and it adds value all the way along.

For example, the wholesale premium for some

popular branded end meats is often 10 to 15 cents above the Choice grade cuts.

Sure it's not the \$1 premium over Choice that wholesale meat buyers paid for that same program's tenderloins last year, but still extra value in the system. And there is way more product to multiply the smaller premium by than there is in the case of the small, but valuable tenderloin.

In the last five years, the premiums on these end meats have been growing, which may have quite a bit to do with the economy. As the price all beef increases, people realize they can have the same quality by switching to a different cut of the same grade or brand, but only at the higher end of quality.

They don't want to give up quality or protein choice, so they just find cheaper cuts.

Work through the Beef Checkoff has helped identify new alternatives and ways to keep beef customers by pointing them toward some of these end-meat bargains.

Premium grinds, made out of whole-muscle cuts and higher quality beef, have also gained in sales popularity over the last decade, adding more value to these outside subprimals.

The bottom line for cattlemen is that the chuck is just as important as the rib and the round is as significant as the tenderloin. Sure, the dollars per pound aren't equivalent, but the higher quality across the entire carcass allows Team Beef to keep consumers, to market meat that fits their demands and to get top dollar on the entire animal. Δ

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