

Bryan Schaaf:

Right here on the Meat Speak Podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand, located in Northeast Ohio and here in the little studio, as always, joining us all the way on the far side of the table, chef Tony Biggs. How are you doing, sir?

Tony Biggs:

Hey, how are you today?

Bryan Schaaf:

Glorious, yourself?

Tony Biggs:

I'm fantastic.

Bryan Schaaf:

Nice. And of course, meat scientist, Diana Clark. How are you?

Diana Clark:

I'm doing great.

Bryan Schaaf:

Fantastic, wearing her Chicago Meatheads Certified Angus Beef hat as well.

Diana Clark:

I keep the room flat, by the way, it's got to be flat in Chicago.

Bryan Schaaf:

But we pride ourselves, not just on understanding what trends are, but really trying to be out in front of what's hip, what's trendy, right? I like to think that Tony Biggs probably sets some trends. He's doing things years before you see them pop in other places and a big trend, and I remember reading this back in early 2020, when of course everybody comes up with their different food guides, like what's hip, what should you be aware of?

Bryan Schaaf:

And one of the things they talked about was this thing called biltong, which is a dried meat product. So let me tell you how trendy we are, right? Because on staff, and now actually standing wedged in between chef Tony and Diana Clark is chef Peter Rosenberg, who is a chef here at Certified Angus Beef. But understand, Peter comes to us all the way from a small country in Africa, that was called Rhodesia, today it's called Zimbabwe. In 2020, the food and wines of the world are talking about how hip biltong is. Biltong comes from Peter's neck of the woods. He grew up eating this. Peter Rosenberg, tell us about biltong.

Peter Rosenberg:

Absolutely a great preserved piece of meat, kind of very similar to beef jerky. The difference between jerky and biltong is obviously flavoring, but predominantly how they are cured. And the jerky is like a heat oven dry and the biltong is a cured and hung air dried, even with a little bit of a wind, like from a fan, or out in the open in the air and just letting the wind blow through it and dry it out.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. Peter, tell us about your experience. There are a lot of people today that if you say I'm from Rhodesia, they'll think it's somewhere outside of Albuquerque, right? But tell us about growing up in Rhodesia. This, man, this was a staple. This is part of something that you grew up with.

Peter Rosenberg:

It's absolutely. So let's go back to a quick history on it. Biltong actually means buttocks. So anything from the round area is ideal and the reason for that is the amount of fat and moisture and the flavor of it is great for this kind of cutting. Growing up in Africa, biltong is kind of like a king, just the same way brisket is here in the US. So you go to your favorite brisket house, you go to your favorite butcher over there.

Peter Rosenberg:

They would cure it, dry it, hang it on clotheslines, running across the back of the butchery. And you'd walk in there and pick them out, just like, I want one of those and I want one of those. And they would say, "Do you want to cut or do you want to take it whole?" Everybody has their own preference. Predominantly, just the flavoring on it is very, very simple. It's vinegar, salt, pepper, coriander and that's it. That's the true, main seasoning that goes on a biltong.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. But before we really dive into biltong at a deeper level, Diana, when we talk about these dried meats, whether it's a jerky, whether it's a biltong, whether it's anything along those lines, like a lot of foods that we eat these days, it came out of an idea of food preservation, so the meats wouldn't spoil. What's actually going on inside the meat as this stuff is being made?

Diana Clark:

So your goal here is to try to remove water. So you have different types of water within meat. Some of it's bound, some of it's immobilized, some of it's intracellular cellular, some of it's outside those cells. And your goal is to try to remove as much water as you can, because that's what things grow with. Bacteria, molds, they can grow when they have access to that water. So if we remove it, then we don't have that chance of spoilage by having more of that bacteria growth.

Diana Clark:

And so, sometimes it's removing it through heat. Other times it's removing it through salt. I mean, even if you think of jerky, you're heavily salting that. This you're going to be putting salt on it. You also have that acid too, that's helping break down some of that cell structure and remove that moisture. And that's your overall goal. And the more moisture loss you have, the more shelf stable that product will be. And the less bacteria growth chances that you'll have too.

Bryan Schaaf:

So it will last a whole lot. Okay, meat scientist, what's the shelf life on something like this.

Diana Clark:

So chef Peter is actually, we've tested this, we have a water activity machine over at the culinary center, and this actually gets down to about 0.65 in terms of water activity. Fresh muscle is usually around 0.98 to 0.99. It's pretty high up there.

Diana Clark:

Once you get below the threshold, I think it's a 0.72, you are good. You're set. You can be shelf stable. I think the USDA guidelines still recommend probably about a year or two years just to be safe, but really, it can last for a very long time.

Bryan Schaaf:

Our pals up in Cleveland at Larder, Jeremy Umansky, on some of their stuff, they'll just put like, use in seven years.

Diana Clark:

Yeah. I mean, it's like Twinkies, those things last forever, right?

Bryan Schaaf:

That's right, but they will survive the apocalypse. Chef Tony, man, give us your take on biltong? First, why is this so hip? I mean, Peter's been eating this stuff for the last 30, 40 years, why all of a sudden is this on people's radar?

Tony Biggs:

Well, Peter actually brought this to my attention about five years ago and he was explaining it to me and it sounded so good. And I was walking in one of our local grocery stores, turned to my left and I couldn't believe what was on the shelf was biltong. And I brought a pack and I gave it to him and I said, "Hey, you've created a monster here." Because what we do at Certified Angus Beef, is we create new ideas for you out there, you chefs and scientists.

Tony Biggs:

So he went back to the lab, we started playing around with it. I said, "Hey, Peter, why don't you come up with your favorite one?" He created a lime pickle, Indian lime pickle biltong, which was epic. I mean, unbelievable. So it's one of these trendy things, trendy food trends that if you look at it, this is great bar food. I would eat this with a couple of beers, maybe a couple, three or four beers with this. And you just have a knife, a cutting board and you cut small pieces. Hey, let's try this, because I think you got one here, Peter, what is this flavor profile?

Peter Rosenberg:

That one is the pure original, which just got coriander, salt, pepper, vinegar.

Tony Biggs:

Amazing.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Tony Biggs:

Amazing

Diana Clark:

And the beauty of it with the salt. I mean, for bar food, you're just going to buy more drinks after that.

Tony Biggs:

Exactly, right?

Diana Clark:

It's going to be a good night.

Tony Biggs:

It's a hook, right?

Bryan Schaaf:

Well, and I noticed that as we look at this, and of course, speaking as somebody who is, I'm sort of your average, just kind of meathead guy who just eats a lot of food, but I can't tell you a whole lot about it. I look at this, at first glance, it looks a bit like jerky, but there's a fat cap on this.

Peter Rosenberg:

The fat cap on it is actually the best part of the dish. It gives it that little bit of moisture. And that's why the round cuts are so good because it has a really thin fat outer cut on it, just about every one that you use. Every cut from the round is going to have a little bit of that fat. So the fat adds flavor, adds moisture, brings a little bit juice back because you've got a dehydrated piece of beef. And so, that's what that is.

Peter Rosenberg:

The other fun thing about this, as you just mentioned, as bar food. In Africa, they would have these in jars behind the bar. You would select which one you want, they hand it to you, you set there, drank a beer and you had your little pocket knife and you sat there and you just whittled piece after piece after piece and you just sat there and talked. So it's a social cut. You'd cut a piece for your friend, you cut a piece, maybe not for your friend and you just keep it all for yourself, I don't know.

Bryan Schaaf:

And if this is what they do, if a bar fight erupts, I mean, you're armed, right? You got your protection on you. So if you could, Peter, Tony, walk us through this. You've already mentioned cuts from the round. You mentioned cuts that are near the H bone right towards the back of the animal are great for it. Walk us through the method that you go to, first, to make this in general. But too, I mean, it kind of sounds like the sky's the limit, you're only limited by your own creativity in terms of what you can make this reflect in the way of taste.

Peter Rosenberg:

So simply, what you're doing is you are trimming the outer surface so that it's nice and clean, there's no connective tissue. And that's the great thing about the round, it is solid beef, whichever cut you go to. So then you're going to cut it into about a half, three quarter inch to an inch thick, depending on how long you want it to take to cure. The thinner you cut it the faster it will cure.

Peter Rosenberg:

This particular batch that you're looking at over here, on Friday afternoon, poured some vinegar on top of it, seasoned with the salt, pepper, coriander, hung it up to dry and when I hang it up to dry, I use like a curing box, but you can put it into your oven, hang it on the racks, without the oven on. Just totally let it hang and drip down, straight down, with maybe a little bit of a fan in the beginning, just to dry it off so that it becomes dry and then just shut it off. And by Monday morning, so that was Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, this was the end product, and will continue to dehydrate as it sits a long time. And you talked about, just how long can you keep a piece? I accidentally found a piece about 25 years later in a box that I ate, pretty good. So Jeremy, if you're listening out there, buddy, I have something that lasts longer than seven years.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's a college graduate by that time, right? Tony, Diana, guys we're talking about round cuts, and the politically correct term, I guess, when you're in the meat industry is these are things that are less tender. These are things that average Joe's probably are going to struggle with. I mean, you can low and slow it, but there's not a whole lot of fat content in there. When you see cuts from the round being used for applications like this or other applications, does that make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside?

Diana Clark:

I'd say yes. And, I mean, when you're working with Certified Angus Beef, especially, the amount of marbling that's in that round cut is phenomenal. Regardless if it's top round, bottom round, eye round, knuckle or heel too. Any cut that you get from the round, really, when you have enough marbling in it, it's fantastic. It's knowing how to cook it correctly, which these chefs do phenomenal work with it, and then on top of that, carving it correctly too.

Diana Clark:

So just making sure you're slicing it against the grain and even this, I mean, Peter's slicing it with the grain. You could use a knife to take into this. I mean, I just bite a piece off and it's still fairly tender. It's a great use for these cuts, but knowing that you still are going to have the benefits of Certified Angus Beef, that marbling that's within there. Peter talked about having the fat cap to have some of that juiciness, but this meat's going to have that fat dispersed throughout, even though it's from the round. I mean, that's the cool part about our brand, our beef.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. I want to go a step farther into the culture behind this and the dishes, but Tony, walk us through, especially in this day and age where a lot of restaurants are in the most difficult year that they've probably ever faced. Tell me about the economics behind this. You're taking a cut that is pretty inexpensive on the front end. You can turn this or you can make some money here, right?

Tony Biggs:

It really is. As a matter of fact, Peter and I just came from our alma mater, The Culinary Institute of America, and on our way up there, we went to a little place called the Bar-Bill restaurant, who by the way, has the best chicken wings in Buffalo, but also they specialize in a beef on weck, which actually Peter did two years ago at one of our food service leaders conferences. It was the hit of the show. So it's a rare roast beef from the round, top round or the eye round, served rare with beautiful horseradish sauce. But the roll is kind of a kummelweck roll, an old German recipe, with sea salt and caraway seeds.

Tony Biggs:

So, they sell this sandwich for about \$10.50, right? For about six ounces of roast beef. One of the loss leaders that we used to do, when I worked in the hotel business with Hyatt Hotels, and Peter has done this as well, is a steamship round. You could go to any Sunday brunch, high-end Sunday brunch around the country, and what is the carving item? It is a steamship round, and you could serve 150 people to 200 folks, depending on the size and how that person cut it. And back then, I think, I was paying a \$1.75 a pound. Now, that bone is probably about three feet long in size. I would bring that home to Oscar and I wouldn't see Oscar for the next three days, so I'm just going to tell you.

Bryan Schaaf:

Continuing on with the idea of the economics, right? I mean, the markup on this by putting a little bit of labor into it is pretty immense, right?

Peter Rosenberg:

It is absolutely fantastic. When you look at the raw cost of the round cuts, you're in the \$2 to \$3 range a pound. By the time you have processed it, dehydrated it, cut it, packaged it and shipped it, you're looking at about \$35 a pound.

Diana Clark:

And I mean, you're looking at portion sizes that are four ounces, maybe.

Peter Rosenberg:

Four ounces, and if you do the math on four ounces you look at yourself and say, "Wow, that's a score."

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, and this has a fat cap on it. And then there is like this little cult, and I don't even know what's a little cult, but there are people who are hardcore about jerky. If you drive up I-75 through Michigan, every roadside stand has like a Michigan made. And it's like 35 bucks for like eight ounces of jerky. It's amazing. But obviously people are buying it, because they're all still doing their thing.

Diana Clark:

And I mean, like Tony was saying, you go to a retail store now, I am amazed with how many different options there are for biltong. And when Peter brought this up five years ago, nothing, like there was nothing. And now it's just exploded, because I think people have realized that this is something that, I mean, you could definitely do in house and you could make good money off of it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well, one of the things, and we talked initially about the fact that biltong is one of those things that is on all these trends lists for 2020. If you go back and look, the last couple of years, this idea of ancient grains has been out there. Tony, you've spent a lot of time with ancient grains, but really, if you think about between biltong between that, between some other dishes, it really all kind of traces back as, quite honestly, what seems to be a lot of humanity, back to Africa. Back to some of those African nations. Can you talk about, I guess, let's broaden that a little bit and talk about old school, African cuisine. Dishes like this.

Tony Biggs:

I'm going to let Peter talk about this dish, but we all learn from each other and when you stop learning, you just don't go anywhere. And he always comes up with these surprises. And so, we did a hind shank, which we always do. We braised it and he said, "Do you want to take sadza?" I go, "What is sadza?" "Oh, wow. Well, that's an African grain kind of like grits, it's from corn." So chef, why don't you explain the dish, how it's made and how it's eaten by the folks in South Africa.

Peter Rosenberg:

I'd love to. Sadza, or it's kind of like a corn meal and it's called maize meal in Africa, is a very fine powder grit, almost like flour. Water, salt, stir that in and you get a mixture that is malleable, so you can pick it up with your hands and dip it in a gravy and add a piece of meat to it and kind of eat it. And that is known, it's an African staple. This is like every meal in Africa where the Africans will congregate.

Peter Rosenberg:

And it's, well we talk about, it's communal and it's fun. You're sitting around as a group, you're gathering, you're eating, you're talking and you're having fun. And everybody's dipping in, grabbing a little bit and tasting. It doesn't have a lot of flavor, but whatever the sauces are that are made with that, like the hind shank, where it's braised and you've got all those nice juices and things, this soaks it up and it is killer. And we're just itching for the right group to come in here for us to be able to put this out as a family style meal, after COVID settles down.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. Amen. There's something to be said about that and chef Gavin made a Beef Wellington last week that I got to feast in. Don't underestimate the power of either like a beef en crouete or something where, if you can like soak up those beef juices, if it's in corn, if it's in a bread, if it's... Holy cow, man. I mean, that's...

Tony Biggs:

That's a topic in itself.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Diana Clark:

I mean, before I was a meat scientist, I knew that that stuff was good. I mean, I would look for it on the plate, come on, it's easy, right?

Tony Biggs:

Or jus, right? I mean, oh my gosh.

Bryan Schaaf:

Barbecue folks call that the mop, right? Peter, you have been in America, I mean, first, before we move on, tell us about your story. It's not very often that we get somebody from Rhodesia, right? I mean, the country is not even around anymore. I mean, it's been renamed. Tell us about you and your journey from Rhodesia to Wooster, Ohio, with us. It's been quite the interesting ride.

Peter Rosenberg:

Actually, it's been great and I wouldn't change a thing. Leaving Rhodesia, I went to South Africa, got an apprenticeship in a hotel. Wanted to see the world and saw an opportunity to go to The Culinary Institute of America and actually get my degree, culinary degree, over there, which is where chef Tony and I were a couple of weeks ago. What a fantastic school. Gave me a passport to the world.

Peter Rosenberg:

Always wanted to travel as a young chef. And as it continued, I saw that this was a passport to the world. And just over the years, we've had such great opportunities to cook for presidents, Queen Elizabeth, tons of movie stars. Work in five-star hotels, meet ca-zillion people, this is the most social industry you're ever going to come across. The best thing about it, your customers become your friends and it's a lifetime relationship. You can call back on anybody, anytime and it's like you never left.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. And I'll add to it, since you didn't go there. You got to escort the ducks at the Peabody, right?

Peter Rosenberg:

I sure did, yeah. In fact, I had to leave the Peabody Hotel because I was itching to cook duck and that just would not have gone over well.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh. On that note, we appreciate you tuning in to the Meat Speak Podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand. If this is your first time tuning in, please know that you can find this across all of your major podcasting platforms that includes Apple, Google Play, Spotify, or simply by visiting us at certifiedangusbeef.com/podcast or I'll embrace my inner millennial. Give us follow on the Instagram, [meat_speak](#). Slide into our DMs. Tell chef Tony his beard is looking extra nice today.

Tony Biggs:

Well, thank you. Thank you.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's very nice. Very nice.

Tony Biggs:

Thank you. Thank you.

This transcript was exported on Sep 24, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Bryan Schaaf:

And on that note, chef Peter Rosenberg, chef Tony Biggs, meat scientists, Diana Clark. Guys, thanks for hanging out today.

Diana Clark:

It's been fun.

Tony Biggs:

Bye-bye.

Peter Rosenberg:

Thank you.

Bryan Schaaf:

This biltong is not going to eat itself, right?

Tony Biggs:

It's going to stay right here with you.

Bryan Schaaf:

And this is why I do this job. Till next time, see you later.