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Guess Who Came to Dinner?

A Beef Checkoff Brigade Serves Stew for 8,000 at Boston Marathon

The Northeast Beef Promotion Initiative (NEBPI) has brought the traditional beef stew — some 1,000 pounds of it — back to the Boston Marathon.

While manning a beef checkoff-funded booth April 17 at the world's most famous marathon the NEBPI, a collaborative group of Northeast state beef councils, sponsors and volunteers, served 8,000 samples of Beef Stew Provençal to race spectators. A bowl of beef stew historically was a part of finishing the grueling, 26.2-mile race since it began in 1896. Over the past 110 years, as race entries grew from a few dozen to 20,000-plus, the stew went only to the winners, along with prize money and the time-honored olive-leaf crown.

“We really had great exposure because the Boston Marathon is a world-class event. Our booth was only about 100 yards from the finish line so we had lots of samplers and rave reviews,” said Allison Wenter, director of retail marketing and public relations.

The beef councils also enjoyed manpower from members of the 2006 National Beef Ambassador Program, which is partially funded by the beef checkoff, and coordinated by the American National CattleWomen Inc., on behalf of the Cattlemen's Beef Board.

“Many came back twice and were impressed to hear the recipe was from the checkoff-funded ‘Healthy Beef Cookbook,’” said Peter Scharpe, an ambassador from Minnesota.

The beef industry even had its own representative runner, Brian Briner, a veteran marathoner and veal producer from Wisconsin. Briner ran in a shirt sporting the “Beef. It's What's for Dinner” tag line and remembers hearing

encouraging shouts of “Go beef!” from the crowds lining the course. His first meal after the race? Beef filet, a protein athletes favor because it helps repair miniscule muscle tears caused by endurance events, Briner explained. (He should know: Beef is on the training table as he prepares now for The Ironman, a combined marathon, biking and swimming competition held each year in Hawaii. Participants must qualify to participate.)

Chef Timothy Harris, senior culinary instructor at the Harrisburg Community College, used the “The Healthy Beef Cookbook” to prepare Beef Stew Provencal, using chuck shoulder roast from the new Beef Value Cuts product line. The beef was donated by Cargill Meat Solutions, Taylor Packing, in Wyalusing, Pa.

Preparing and delivering stew for 8,000 samplers required a Herculean effort, Wenther said. It took more than seven hours just to transport the stew, in 25 five-gallon containers, to Boston.

Prior to the annual spring race, NEBPI partnered with the morning show on local radio station WZLX, taking the beef message to its 400,000 listeners. The station ran the Sam Elliot enjoyment spots and aired contests to win “The Healthy Beef Cookbook” and summer grilling sets, Wenther added.

The Beef Checkoff Program was established as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. The checkoff assesses \$1 per head on the sale of live domestic and imported cattle, in addition to a comparable assessment on imported beef and beef products. States retain up to 50 cents on the dollar and forward the other 50 cents per head to the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion and Research Board, which administers the national checkoff program, subject to USDA approval.

The American National CattleWomen Inc. is a trade association of U.S. women in the beef cattle industry, with the primary focus of promotion and consumer education regarding beef as a safe and nutritious food and the promotion of beef cattle as an industry.

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