

PRODUCING BEEF AT *R1 500/kg*



Brian Angus is the owner of the first and largest herd of Japanese Wagyu cattle in South Africa, 130 females and 25 bulls. He aims to introduce South African gourmets to locally produced Kobe beef, a famous delicacy which retails at R1 500/kg worldwide, thanks to its intense marbling and incredible tenderness.

Annelie Coleman visited him on the farm Woodview near Arlington in the Free State to learn more.

"NO, WE DO NOT FEED OUR Wagyu beef or massage them like the Japanese do," quips Brian Angus. But the legend of such practices only enhances the luxurious image of the Kobe beef the Wagyu produce.


'Pure Wagyu beef was the most tender ever tested SA.'

This highly marbled beef, the tenderest ever to be tested in South Africa, retails worldwide at an average R1 500/kg. "A friend recently attended an auction in Kobe, Japan where the 82 carcasses on sale averaged R74 000," marvels Brian. "The most expensive sold for R150 000. Imported Wagyu steak currently retails at R700/300g in Cape Town.

Brian runs his Wagyu stud in conjunction with Red and Black Angus, Red Brangus and Merino studs, but he says that once you've tasted Wagyu you're hooked, and no other steak will ever taste the same again.

"My plan is to expand and run the Wagyu stud as pure genetic resource, and to cross Wagyu with Angus to produce and supply top-quality beef to local consumers in exclusive niche markets," he explains.

"Pure Wagyu beef is so highly marbled that the average housewife won't buy it. "Our initial trials were enthusiastically received by consumers. We sold some Wagyu carcasses to the Mini Pick 'n Pay in Bethlehem, and the cuts virtually flew off the shelves. The latest batch was sold out even before it was unpacked. We also supply beef on a trial basis to a restaurant in Sandton and the Hyatt Hotel, both in Johannesburg, and have had

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- The Japanese Wagyu breed produces the delicacy Kobe beef, which fetches astronomical prices for its tenderness and marbling.
 - The marbling puts off South African consumers but crossing Wagyu with Angus cattle reduces it, while the meat remains remarkably tender.

enquiries from leading supermarkets. "Prospective Wagyu breeders are welcome to contact me. This year we might be able to sell some embryos if there's a surplus. But I'm not selling any breeding stock yet since I'm still building up my own herd."

Brian Angus imported South Africa's first Wagyu in 1998.



Australian feedlots have named the Angus the most preferred breed to cross with Wagyu. The Murray Grey, Shorthorn and Brangus have also crossed well with them.
PHOTOS: ANNELIE COLEMAN

The history of Wagyu

The Japanese Wagyu was derived from native Asian cattle infused with British and European breeds. The production of Wagyu beef in Japan is highly regulated and progeny testing is mandatory. Only the very best proven genetics are kept for breeding.

Wagyu were originally draught animals used for cultivation and selected for physical endurance. This favoured animals with more intra-muscular fat cells (marbling), which provided readily available energy.

Realising the value of this unique product, the Japanese Government declared it a national treasure and banned the export of Wagyu cattle. But the ban fell away when four bulls were mysteriously exported to the US in 1976.

The US Wagyu herd was upgraded from a basis herd of selected local cows with the best Wagyu semen available. With the import of females from Japan via the US to Australia, the Australian genetic lines are now among the best in the world. Australia

The astonishing marbling of Kobe beef. Wagyu also produce healthier fat.

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More marbling, healthier fat

Dr Tim Crowe, chief dietician at Australia's Deakin University's School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, promotes Wagyu beef as a healthy component in a balanced diet, based on its high levels of beneficial omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids.

Wagyu beef also contains a significantly higher proportion of mono-unsaturated fats, with a mono unsaturated: saturated fat ratio up to three times higher than other beef.

Even the saturated fat in Wagyu meat is different. Some 40% of it is in a form called stearic acid, which is regarded as having a minimal impact in raising cholesterol levels.

Tenderest the ARC ever saw

"The Wagyu could drastically change South African beef production," says Brian, who imported the first Wagyu embryos from Tekada Farms in the US in 1998.

"First I had to conduct a comprehensive biological impact study with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and prove the breed would add value to the South African cattle industry," he recalls. "We had to compare the tenderness of Wagyu, Angus and

Sanganer. Tests at the ARC's Meat Centre in Irene revealed the Wagyu meat was the most tender ever tested in the country, with Wagyu/Angus meat in the second place."

A sample of aged loin and rib-eye steaks from a Wagyu/Angus F1 cross was tested against the benchmark tenderness for aged beef.

According to the Boleman and Shackleford benchmarks, consumers can differentiate between three categories of

tenderness: 2,27kg to 3,85kg of shear-force value; 4,08kg to 5,4kg; and 5,9kg to 7,21kg. The individual shear values of Brian's specimens varied between 2kg (tail-end

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE →



RIGHT: Brian Angus imported the first Wagyu embryos from Tekada Farms in the US. His herd has since increased to 130 females and 25 bulls, and he also plans to start selling embryos.

LEFT: Wagyu were originally draft animals used in cultivation in Japan. They were selected for physical endurance, which increased their intramuscular marbling to an extraordinary degree. Japanese Kobe-style beef now retails for as much as R700 for a 300g steak in exclusive restaurants.





ABOVE: The Woodview Wagyu are fertile and early maturing. They drop small calves and the bulls are ideal to open up heifers, although all the cows are artificially inseminated.

RIGHT: Although he initially imported embryos from the US, Brian Angus now imports mainly from Australia. That country has become a major player in the Wagyu industry. The live feeder trade with Japan is a vital part of the industry, and the Australian feedlot industry is a major purchaser of Wagyu and Wagyu-infused cattle.



←○ steaks) and 2,9kg (rear-end steaks and rib-eye) – far below the minimum for exceptional tenderness, for which research shows consumers will pay a premium.

In the feedlot and at stud

The Wagyu is a medium-sized breed, and Woodview Angus x Wagyu steers are rounded off to about 600kg in a feedlot for slaughter. Cows weigh 450kg to 500kg.

‘This year we might sell some embryos if there’s a surplus.’

“It takes about 1,2t of feed to get a feedlot steer to about 420kg,” says Brian. “Wagyu crosses need at least 2t of feed to finish properly, but the high returns on investment offset this.”

The breed is extremely fertile and early maturing. Cows drop small calves, making Wagyu bulls ideal on heifers. All Woodview cows are artificially inseminated. Purebred calves grow at about 1kg/day, and Angus-cross calves grow faster due to heterosis.

“The Wagyu are kept on the veld with standard licks,” says Brian. “The breed doesn’t differ markedly from the others I use in terms of adaptability, hardiness, or resistance to disease and parasites.

Long-term, he aims to expand the feedlot to full capacity, and to lend or sell Wagyu bulls to commercial breeders and buy back calves.

Wagyu on the international scene

“It now costs some R5 000 to import an

embryo from Australia,” says Brian. “US Wagyu breeders became exceedingly protective of their industry, and it’s difficult to get embryos from them.

“The Wagyu industry is thriving in Australia. The Japanese bought feedlots and breeding farms there and bring the animals, live or slaughtered, to Japan. Japanese companies such as Nippon Ham, Maribane and World K are major players in the Australian Wagyu industry.”

• Contact Brian Angus on 082 573 9687. |fw