

Holiday Beef Roast Marketing

Each year, as summer transitions into autumn, consumer beef preference shifts from steaks and grinds to roasts. Starting in October and rising through Thanksgiving, demand for beef roasts reaches its peak at Christmas, one of the most profitable marketing periods for beef processors. While beef roasts of all types enjoy increased consumer demand throughout this period, it is middle meats, cuts from the rib and loin, that are in most demand in December. By the time October arrives, processors are building their stocks of middle meats in sufficient volume to meet the anticipated holiday demand. In doing so, they also produce large stocks of end meats, cuts from the chuck and round. The challenge to marketers is to move as much of these stocks of end meats as possible ahead of Christmas middle meat demand, no small task when you consider that Thanksgiving, with all of its turkeys and hams, lies in their path.

Meeting this challenge requires precision timing to take advantage of marketplace lulls in demand for competing meat proteins. The first opportunity arrives in early October when marketers take advantage of the first crisp days of autumn to market chuck roasts, particularly boneless and arm roasts. In October 2017, 10 percent of annual marketings of chuck roasts took place with a similar but slightly higher percentage of marketings taking place in October 2018. Chuck ads hit circulars again three weeks ahead of Thanksgiving. During the same time period, marketing of round roasts, particularly bottom and top rounds and rump roasts, begins to rise. In 2017 marketing of round roasts during the fourth quarter of the year represented 34 percent of annual marketings, reaching their peak in December only with 13 percent of annual marketings. A similar and slightly more active pace of marketing for round cuts occurred in October 2018.

In 2017, during the Thanksgiving marketing period, end meat roasts accounted for 68 percent of beef roasts marketed, 66 percent during Thanksgiving 2018. Middle meat offerings are dominated by rib roasts during this time, 60 percent of annual middle meat offerings in 2017, as marketers seek to offer a tempting alternative to turkey and ham while, at the same time, attempting to maximize rib cut sales during the few short weeks between the holidays. By Christmas, the ratio of end to middle meats improves for middle meats, particularly for rib cuts which enjoyed a 25 percent market share in 2017. While loin cuts enjoy good retail exposure during the November-December marketing period, with 27 percent of annual marketings in 2017 occurring at this time, 13 percent in December alone, it is rib roasts that dominate. In 2017, 61 percent of annual rib roast marketings occurred in November-December, 40 percent in December alone (*see table at right*). Not surprising that standing (bone-in) beef rib roast has come to be known as the "Christmas" roast.

Conventional Beef Roasts - Share of Annual Marketings

Primal	November	December
Rib	22.1%	39.2%
Loin	8.2%	13.3%
Chuck	7.7%	9.9%
Round	9.1%	15.2%
Total Middle	15.1%	25.7%
Total End	9.7%	14.4%

During the Christmas 2017 marketing season, 91 percent of marketed beef was produced in conventional systems. Antibiotic-free offerings accounted for just over 6 percent of marketings, nearly double from 2016. Grass-fed beef offerings, at 2.4 percent and organic beef at .2 percent were unchanged from 2016. The popularity of antibiotic-free beef and its availability in retail outlets has been on the rise in recent years. During Christmas 2017, beef was marketed under a host of brand names including processor, distributor, and store brands. Beef marketed as Certified Angus made up by far the largest share at 14 percent. Beef not identified by brand accounted for 52 percent of offerings while supermarket branded beef made up 24 percent, reflecting a strong desire by retailers to associate their marques with beef. Regardless of brand, 84

percent of beef marketed was labeled USDA Choice with USDA Select at 3 percent and USDA Prime at nearly 2 percent. About 11 percent of beef was not marketed with a USDA grade designation.

Conventional Beef Roasts - Market Share During the Holidays

Primal	Christmas '17	Thanksgiving '17	Thanksgiving '18
Rib	24.8%	19.6%	20.0%
Loin	17.7%	12.8%	13.8%
Chuck	18.3%	24.1%	23.4%
Round	39.1%	43.5%	42.8%
Middle Meats	42.5%	32.4%	33.9%
End Meats	57.5%	67.6%	66.1%

T-Day 2018 preliminary estimates

Information for this report is derived from data reported in the [Feature Advertising by U.S. Supermarkets Meat and Poultry](#) report series and the [National Retail Beef](#) report.

