

# She Sells Beef Direct At Gas Stations

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

You'd never think you could get a good T-bone steak at a gas station or convenience store. But an enterprising sixth-generation North Dakota rancher is making that possible at several gas stations located between Watertown, S.Dak., and Fargo, N.Dak.

Lacey Block knew direct sales could increase income from her beef cattle. However, retail stores are difficult to get into and would make her meat too expensive for many customers. She nervously approached a locally-owned gas station owner who agreed to sell her beef because he recognized it could benefit his business by bringing in more customers.

"I wanted to keep it easy on the vendor's end," Block says, knowing that store space is precious. She purchased upright freezers and had them wrapped with her story to inform customers that they were buying local beef.

Rancher's Rebellion Beef Company didn't happen overnight, she points out. She spent about 6 mos. taking care of the legal issues - registering her business, setting up for sales tax, and following Department of Agriculture specifications including the product labeling.

She had booked butchering (20 to 30 cows/month) so that she was ready to supply retail businesses by last February. Her process is to haul her cattle to the USDA-inspected plant, pick up the packaged meat, and stock

her freezers in 8 stores and deliver to 4 restaurants and other customers. She fits it in along with her full-time job as a nurse.

The Corona virus pandemic hit just after she started, and initially stations reduced their hours. Schools closed and consumers were limiting their shopping to grocery stores.

"I did more direct sales to get community awareness," Block says. She used her website and Facebook and other social media and arranged deliveries.

Later, when grocery stores had meat shortages and raised prices, more customers discovered Block's locally raised beef at gas stations.

"I never increased my prices because my inputs weren't different," she says, and she gained many repeat customers who were impressed with the flavor and quality of the beef.

Block sells everything the USDA allows from steaks, roast, ribs and burger to organs and oxtail. She's also sold bulk suet for deer sausage and fat to someone who makes honey soap.

"If I have extra inventory I will sell quarters, halves or by the pound," she adds. At times, she also opens up her website to nationwide shipping though it's a lot of extra steps with packing in Styrofoam and ice packs.



North Dakota rancher Lacey Block sells beef direct at local gas stations. She stocks them with upright freezers that let customers know they're buying local beef.

She is open to expanding to other markets, such as a fitness center that recently agreed to sell her beef.

"I want this idea to take off," she says, so she and future generations like her two sons can continue to raise cattle for a fair, sustainable price.

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# Student Found His Passion Restoring Oliver Combine

As a teenager walking through a farm auction, Eli Raines spotted an old Oliver 7300 combine and knew right away he wanted to restore one. "Our family had a 1650 Oliver tractor but I had no idea Oliver even made combines until I saw one," Raines says.

Eli and his father eventually bought an old 7300 from a farmer about 150 miles from their northwest Iowa farm. "We got that one home and I realized it was in really tough shape, almost to the point of not worth saving," he says. They soon located another one that the farmer hadn't used for more than a decade.

"The engine was a 318 CID Chrysler that started right up, and the farmer said I could have the machine if I was going to restore it," Raines says. He drove the 45-year-old machine home, even after he learned that the original owner's son had removed many

belts, pulleys and chains for engineering projects in college.

Raines pulled parts from the first machine to replace those on the other one and eventually assembled a usable combine that was nearly 5 decades old. He painted the machine in the summer of 2019 and received high praise from judges at a local fair for the size and complexity of his project. In the fall he used it to harvest corn and beans on his parent's farm, even though field conditions were very wet.

"One day I got the machine stuck in a wet field and tore up the transmission trying to get it out," Raines says. "Luckily I was able to repair it using replacement parts from my other machine. It works fine and I hope to keep using it."

Raines is now a college student and plans to continue rebuilding and restoring equipment.



Iowa teenager Eli Raines restored this old Oliver 7300 combine to working order. He received high praise from judges at a local fair for the size and complexity of the project.

He's narrowing a 36-in. row width planter to 30-in. for use in the spring and recently bought a White 8900 combine to rework.

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# Redneck Christmas Parade An Annual Hit

If people can have parades in town, why can't country folks have a parade on county roads? That was the thinking of Dan Stacks and a few of his buddies back in 2011 when he was a high school senior.

"It started out as a joke," Stacks says, but the Riggsville Redneck Christmas Parade has turned into a beloved tradition for folks in the Michigan communities south of the Mackinac Bridge.

The first parade took 2 hrs. with 13 "floats" traveling about 9 miles of county roads. The parade scheduled for this year already has all the necessary permits, road closures, and law enforcement assistance planned, says Stacks, who now works for the Cheboygan County Sheriff's Department.

"This has truly become an annual event in Riggsville, and one where families plan their Christmas parties around. If you take a drive around Riggsville hours before the event, you will find driveways, fields and parking spots full of bonfires, tailgating and celebration," Stacks says.

People travel from other communities to park in farm fields along the route, courtesy

of landowners and people who plow snow.

"It takes our volunteers a couple weeks of nonstop plowing to keep the parking lots free of drifting snow," Stacks says. "Last year the plowed hayfields could barely accommodate all the spectators."

While parade participants throw out candy, spectators are equally generous in what they give to local charities including Toys for Tots and Coats for Kids. The St. Thomas Food Pantry has been especially pleased with donations at a crucial time of year.

"Last year, we could not fit all the food donations in a full-size livestock trailer," Stacks says.

Along with charity, humor and goodwill that are part of the country parade, there's been a little romance. One participant's float "broke down" in front of the Catholic church. When his girlfriend came to help him, he surprised her by changing his "Merry Christmas" lights to "Marry Me."

Stacks emphasizes that the event succeeds because of community backing, plenty of volunteers and participants eager to come together as a community.



It started out as a joke, but the Riggsville Redneck Christmas Parade has turned into a beloved tradition for folks in some northern Michigan communities.

"Despite snow, bitter cold, and wind, the parade has grown every year," Stacks says. And unless there's a major executive order, Covid-19 won't stop it this year. The 9th Annual Riggsville Redneck Christmas Parade starts at 7 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 19. About

30 floats are expected to travel the 6-mile route around Riggsville.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Facebook: 9th Annual Riggsville Redneck Christmas Parade.