

It beats Sbisa's eggs

By **MARCY BOYCE**
Battalion Reporter

Breakfast for the average student here might range from a bowl of cereal and a couple of doughnuts to Sbisa's infamous eggs. But across the tracks in the Kleberg Building, it's a different story. For many of the graduate students in the Meats and Muscle Biology department, it's steak for breakfast five days a week. And better yet, already cut into bite-size pieces.

These graduate students, along with a technician and two faculty members are on the department's sensory panel, which does daily taste tests of beef, pork, lamb and occasionally goat, for juiciness, flavor desirability, muscle fiber and overall tenderness and the amount of connective tissue.

Because this type of scoring requires more knowledge than an average consumer might have, graduate students within the department are recruited as volunteers, said research scientist Bob Hostetler. He is in charge of the sensory panel and has been a participant almost every day for 20 years.

During the test, up to eight panelists are seated at a partitioned table against a wall. Each booth has a window with a sliding door through which eight samples of meat are distributed to each participant by technicians in an adjoining room, the Food Preparation Lab.

This arrangement, Hostetler said, insures that the scores do not reflect any reactions to those doing the preparation and serving.

"I'm always hungry," said panelist Karen Lindau, a technician in the department. "And it's a pretty good breakfast."

Nevertheless, Lindau said she usually spits out the samples after chewing them, to keep from gaining weight.

After chewing the sample, participants score them on a scale from one to eight. The scores, Hostetler said, are sometimes similar, but at other times vary greatly.

"Panelists really shouldn't score the same because meat is so

non-homogeneous," he said. Also, personal preference is another factor which determines the score.

Davey Griffin said his enjoyment of the panel depends largely on what they are testing. For example, he said, he doesn't like lamb.

Some of the meat tested is owned by Texas A&M, Hostetler said, but some is owned by Texas companies interested in meat research.

One company in Houston, he said, is having comparisons done on the tenderness of meat purchased from packers in different sections of the country.

Precision in the preparation of the meat before testing presents some problems. "We have a conflict between cooking the way a housewife does and cooking such that it can be repeated," Hostetler said.

First, the pieces of meat are cut to a precise size. Then two thermocouples are placed in the center of the meat to make sure it is cooked at the same temperature.

Data collected from the panelists is used in research to analyze different methods of processing, Hostetler said, as well as variables which contribute to a longer shelf life for meats, such as freezing and packaging.

But, Hostetler said, "tenderness and ways of changing the tenderness are our primary interest."

One of the methods researched several years ago was the Texas A&M Tenderstretch, developed by Hostetler and Dr. Bernard Link, who is no longer here.

By changing the manner in which the carcass is suspended after slaughtering, Hostetler said, the tenderness of the muscles from which most steaks are roasts beef was improved.

This idea was not implemented on the commercial market, he said, because it changed the appearance of many of the cuts and would also cause a slaughtering house to be modified.

Currently, Hostetler said, they are researching electro-shock as a method of killing the animals to improve the meat's tenderness.



Karen Lindau puts her taste buds to work on a sample of prime beef steak at a Meats and Muscle Biology Department's taste session. As part of the department's sensory panel, eight members do taste tests of meats for juiciness, flavor desirability, muscle fiber and overall tenderness and the amount of connective tissue.
Photo by Sam Stroder

FOCUS

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On the Cover: The top photograph shows the Spoetzl Brewery as it was in 1909. The bottom is the brewery today. Photos courtesy of the Spoetzl Brewery.

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