

Meat courses assist students determine career interests

By LAURA LARSON

It is no accident that Americans consume the highest amount of red meat per capita of any nation in the world. Besides leading the world in production of meat animals, the United States prides itself in having many well-trained meats researchers, specialists and handlers who insure that products for consumption are wholesome and of high quality.

The meats section of the Texas A&M University Animal Science department plays an important role in training students for careers in the meats field, as well as developing in other animal science students a general awareness and appreciation for the meats industry, according to Dr. Gary Smith, head of the A&M meats section.

"The purpose of Animal Science 307 (commonly called meats) is to create in the student an appreciation for the end product since all of the courses in the animal science department, with the exception of the

horse-related courses, in some way relate to meats," said Smith, the instructor.

"We try to stress parasite and disease control, the effects of different feeds, breeding programs and handling procedures in relation to their influence on the end meat product as well as providing a hands-on experience type of lab for the students."

In the lab students learn to slaughter, grade and cut up beef, pork and lamb.

Smith explained the lab is mostly based on illustrative factors, such as demonstrations that help the students understand slaughtering by seeing the procedure. Then students get in and actually work with their hands.

"We no longer try to teach only manipulative slaughter skills in the course, as in the past, because too many labs would be spent in the actual slaughter process and too little time would be left for other topics."

He said the course does not prepare students to go right out and work, but helps them determine if their career interests lie in the meats field or in a specific facet of the industry. Only two or three percent of the students who complete the course choose to specialize in meats.

These students then take four other meats classes before graduation.

The 307 course and lab are taught in the Animal Industries building, where the meats lab has been in operation for nearly 50 years.

He also noted that meat graduates have three to four times more employment opportunities than other animal science majors because many people are not willing to work in the extremes of the meat packing industry environment.

Smith acknowledged that since the majority of students who take 307 are more oriented toward production agriculture, it is most important to develop a general overview of meats and help students integrate all their course work toward the end product. This includes a science and chemistry background.

"You may be able to keep an animal alive on rations and drugs, but you have to consider the end product," he said.

Smith said the animals slaughtered and used for the class are specifically purchased for that purpose. Research animals are not used. The meat is retrimmed and reworked by permanent employees after the students have finished using it because of a difference in skill among the students and the regular workers.

All of this meat is then sold to the creamery, which has been marketing meat for almost 12 years. Only one quarter of the meat the creamery sells is from teaching purposes; the rest is from Texas A&M research animals. These are animals from breeding or physiological research only, nothing else which may harm the consumer is used.

Gwen Gates, a junior from Ponca City, Okla., who took the course last spring, said, "I liked it because of the good general knowledge I gained of the meat industry as a whole. I enjoyed the slaughtering portion of the lab because it helped me understand many problems the industry faces."

Animal Science 317 is another popular meats course. It deals with more technical and practical information for meat selection, grading and evaluation. It is taken mainly by students interested in becoming federal graders, teaching vocational agriculture or trying out for the A&M meats judging team.

Dr. Jeff Savell, who teaches the course, said it provides students with a better working knowledge of the subject than they get in 307.

Presently 12 students are involved with the senior judging team coached by Glen Dolezal. They were enrolled in 317 in the fall of 1978 and competed last spring and this fall.

The current semester's 317 class will produce the junior meats judging team for the coming spring, which is coached by Gregg Gossett.

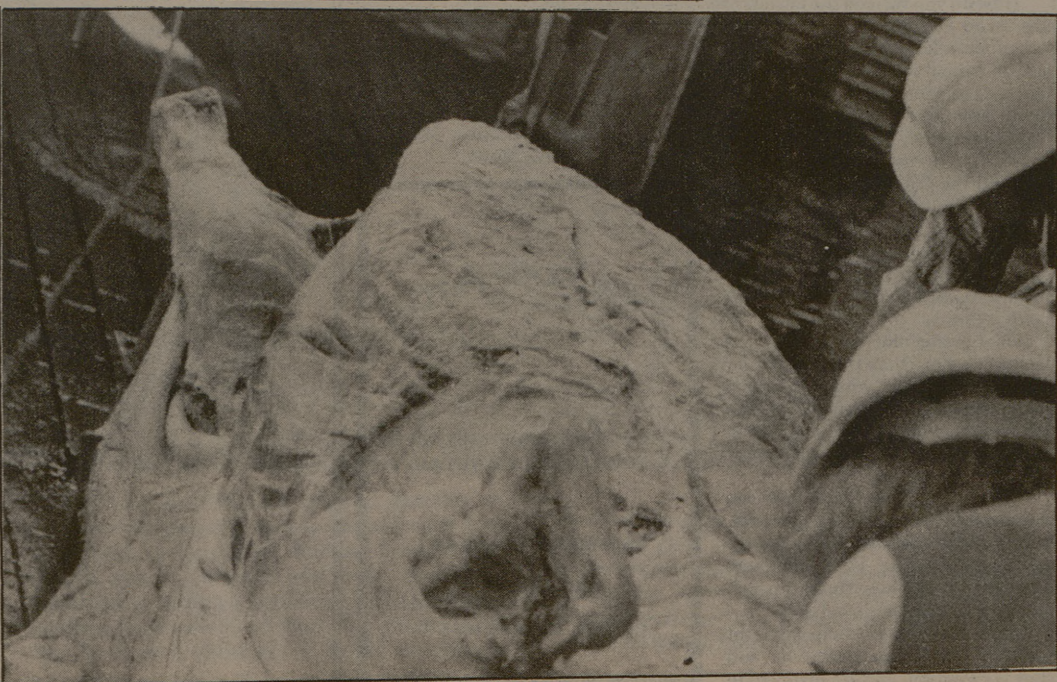
Gates, who is currently a member of the senior meats judging team, said "I enjoy the team because of the extreme competitiveness. You compete locally just to be a member of the team because the A&M team is always the team to beat in any contest."

She also says she likes to travel and see how other packing plants across the country are operated.

Because of the meats program at A&M, many graduates of A&M have found top jobs in the meats industry. For instance, Frank Shubar has advanced to vice president of Safeway, Inc., in charge of meats. Dr. Rod Bowling is vice president of Monfort of Colorado. E.M. Rosenthal owns Standard Meats Co. in Fort Worth, which is the second largest purveyor plant in the country, and Robert Goch is associated with Gooch Packing Co. of Abilene.

Aggies in these three photos get hands-on slaughtering experience in the meats lab in the Animal Industries building. Animal Science 307 is the most popular meats course at A&M and has been taught in this facility for nearly 50 years.

Photos by Mary Anne Snowden



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