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Cargill beefs up effort to market first national brand of hamburger

Wichita Business Journal - by [Pat Sangimino](#)

Studies show today's consumer spends 10 minutes a day making dinner preparation plans and that usually comes during the drive to the grocery store at the end of the work day.

"They say, 'I need to feed my family something,' " says Ivan Brown, a brand manager at **Cargill**. "Often times it's ground beef."

Ground beef is an American staple, a tried-and-true commodity -- along with milk, bread and eggs -- that has been the cash cow of grocers for generations.

Now Cargill is turning its attention to ground beef for its next national branding effort.

It introduced Meadowlands Farms ground beef -- its first effort in branding a product that had always been considered a commodity -- in June, and, with the help of Sullivan Higdon & Sink, has aggressively marketed the product.

It's a worthwhile venture in that statistics show ground beef makes up for half of a grocery store's meat sales and 4 percent of a store's overall sales.

"That makes it pretty darn important," Brown says.

Grocery Stores on Board

Since its rollout, about 500 grocery stores in the Northeast, West Coast and Upper Midwest have signed on to carry the brand, which features a variety of lean ratings as well as sirloin, chuck and ground beef cuts.

"It's been gradual growth," Brown says. "We're seeing more and more stores come aboard."

The product is being marketed commercially as well. In addition to the one-pound trays commonly seen in meat cases, 10-pound tubes -- referred to as chubs -- are also available for restaurants and other service industries.

The ground beef is produced at plants in Fresno, Calif., Milwaukee and Wyalusing, Pa. More than 120 million people live within an eight-hour drive of the plants. That feeds into the marketing effort that Meadowland Farms is regional. The proximity ensures the product can be transported quickly -- within a day's drive -- which ensures freshness.

"People like to know where the product is coming from, especially with ground beef," Brown says. "It's a national name, but it's coming from a local place."

It's a departure from the ordinary where a grocery store meat case is "a sea of red," Brown says.

"The thing about ground beef is it's always been treated as a commodity -- plain tray and wrap," says Dave Mace, a senior brand strategist at SHS. "There's been no real branding effort put behind it. ... We believe there is the opportunity to create the first national brand of ground beef and put it in the stores across America."

Still, it's doubtful at this point that Meadowland Farms ground beef will ever make it to the meat counters in Wichita. It's not within eight hours of any of the three ground beef plants and the product has not yet been pitched to **Dillon Companies Inc.**, which gets most of its ground beef from Cargill's Dodge City plant.

"About 90 percent of it comes from Dodge City," says Sheila Lowrie, a spokesperson for **Dillons**. "For us, it's all about location. By getting it there, it's a fresher product once it comes into our stores so I'm not sure we would ever see (Meadowland Farms) in our stores."

Meadowland Farms ground beef

- Cargill's first effort to create a national brand for ground beef.
- Produced in Fresno, Calif., Milwaukee and Wyalusing, Pa.
- Each plant located within an eight-hour drive of a population base of 120 million people.
- The three plants combine to produce more than 400 million pounds of ground beef annually.

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