

NPC Road Trip

Ginsberg Sales and Customer Service

June 24, 2010

This past week a group of Ginsberg Sales, and Customer Service representatives took an instructive road trip to NPC meat processors, in Burlington, VT. This was a volunteer effort on behalf of the both departments to find out first hand where our fresh steaks and specialty cut meats are fabricated.

NPC as a company is about 20 years old. It is currently owned and run by Dan and Rob Desautels. NPC is a little cramped in their current facility, which is about 9,000 square feet, but it is notably clean and professional in its operation. They expect to break ground very soon on a new, state of the art facility nearby, also in So. Burlington, which will be 26,000 square feet in it's opening phase. This should take about 9 months to complete.

This is a USDA inspected processing plant, with full HACCP certification (Hazard Analysis at Critical Control Points). They are not large compared to national plants, but they have nitch markets which have become very profitable over the years. About 10 years ago, beef sales from Great Britain and Ireland were prohibited due to Mad Cow Disease. The smart folks at NPC began to manufacture several Irish specialty products, such as Bangers, a special sausage, and Rashers, a cured bacon made from boneless pork loins. NPC is now the second largest producer of Irish Specialty meat products, shipping all over the USA. They ship out a full truckload of Rashers every other week to the West Coast, processed from brined, cured prime center cut pork loins.

Both Rob and Dan are proud of their work force, which is currently about 60 strong. They say they pay well, and their turnover is minimal to nil. Due to the demographics in the Burlington area, they have a pretty unique crew of meat cutters that comes from 3 main areas, Bosnia, Vietnam, and Sherpas from the Himalaya region. We were able to meet and speak with many of the staff, who were very friendly and loved to have their pictures taken.

We were able to see most of the machinery which was operating that day, pretty much all but the sausage machines, with which they had finished with earlier in the day (thank goodness). The machines included gigantic automatic slicers, Jaccard (pinning) machines, metal detectors, grinders, tumblers and vacuum wrapping machines. The work floor is distinctly separated into receiving, storage, and general meat processing. There is a separate area for chicken.



The Ginsberg Road Crew



Josie Dunbar and Betsi Krisniski



As you walk into the processing area, from the storage and receiving sections, you find a white foam lightly coating the floor. This is a sanitizing solution that is constantly sprayed at each entrance, which ends up in all sections of the room. The workers wear large rubber boots, hard hats, hair nets, lab coats, and pretty thick gloves. This can be a dangerous job for those who are inexperienced, one reason the Desautels are adamant about low worker turnover.



In the general meat area, we met some folks working the slicing machine for Rashers, one cutter making frenched pork chops, and then we met the prime meat cutters. All of the high end meats, such as Sirloin strip steaks, Ribeyes, and Tenderloins are cut by two people, Twee, and Jimmy. It was a pleasure to watch them work, as they both are obviously very skilled. Much of the Ribeyes are cut as bone in steaks, with a bandsaw, but all of the boneless sirloins, top butt steaks, and boneless ribeyes are Jaccarded in a very special, expensive Jaccard machine. We watched a very large batch of Flap Meat being worked off through this machine. This is a product very popular with many Mexican Restaurants. Rob Desautels called these Arnold Schwarzeneger steaks, as it comes from the Pectoral muscles.



Twee and Jimmy cutting Filets

The entire facility works on a five day schedule, with two distinctly separate shifts. Depending on the work load, the cutters will work from early in the day for about 10 hours. Each room is refrigerated, and has its own strict temperature control, according to the HACCP plan. The second shift is the cleaning shift, and it can be as long as the cutting shift. Each machine is well cleaned with certified cleanser, very carefully, as even when they are not working, they are dangerous. They are then cleaned with high pressure steam, finished with a quaternary sanitizer, inspected, and signed off on.



Flap meat ready for the Jaccard machine

The chicken room is in a totally separate area, with plastic door flaps and of course the constant sanitizing foam at the entrance. The chicken they use is all certified as all natural, as in ADF free, and hormone free. The meat is all cut by hand, by knife. Most large processors cut using lasers, and water jets, which make for ragged edges, and less precise trim. Most of the chicken breasts are further processed in a tumbler, which gives the meat a “pump”. This is a vacuum process which adds liquid to the product, and is used in many kinds of processed meat products. They use an all natural marinade made from sea salt, lemon juice, and vinegar, plus water, with no phosphates.



Padma Monger working at the Tumbler

All in all, this was a fun and informative trip. Everyone agreed that it was well worth our time, and it was a very good thing to do, to visit one of Ginsberg's major vendors, and learn a little of what goes into our fresh cut steak program. It was also a good way foster communication between the Ginsberg departments which handle this product, and the NPC crew. All of the road trip members now know how to contact Rob Desautels, or his brother Dan, with any special requests or needs, and we all know whom to contact in their customer service department when we have questions. In this way our customers may be better served in the future.

I would like to thank the management and staff at NPC for their hospitality, and the time they took to give us the tour, and answer our many many questions. I look forward to bringing another set of Ginsberg staff to visit NPC in the future. And I am looking forward to seeing the development of the new facility.



***Krishna, cutting chicken
Krishna is also our regular
Thursday delivery driver to Ginsbergs***



Cutting chicken breast in the chicken room



Be careful, it is a dangerous place to work



Betsi wanted me to show you a cake she made

