



# USMEF Program Activities

## U.S. Beef Tops Competition in EU Taste Challenge

The world's largest international food and beverage trade exhibition, SIAL, was the setting for a unique blind taste challenge this October that put U.S. striploins, top blades and flank steaks in direct comparison, side by side with top-quality striploins from Argentina, Ireland, Germany and France.

More than 1,000 visitors to the SIAL show sampled unlabeled grilled American steaks alongside unlabeled steaks from Europe and Argentina, and filled out extensive surveys while they chewed. The preparation of the questionnaire and analysis of the results was conducted by an impartial French marketing research firm.

And the winner: U.S. beef.



*SIAL attendees wait for their chance to take the U.S. Beef Challenge*

“We took great care to ensure that this test would be held under the fairest conditions possible,” said John Brook, U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) regional director for Europe, Russia and the Middle East. “With at least 100 days grain feeding and coming from non-hormone-treated cattle (NHTC), a large proportion of U.S. beef arriving in the EU grades choice, but we did not pre-select the U.S. beef used. We deliberately took the U.S. beef randomly from the largest supplier to the market and went out of our way to get the best possible striploins we could find from the other countries. The Argentinean and Irish beef came from highly reputed quality packers, and the French and German beef came from Europe’s best beef cattle and was aged on the bone for three weeks before packing. Indeed I was quite shocked by the price that we had to pay for these other samples.”

The outcome couldn't have been scripted better by Hollywood. The U.S. beef was consistently the most appreciated on the quality criteria addressed by the questionnaire. The

volunteer tasters each rated three samples on a scale of 1 to 7 for the meat's tenderness, juiciness, flavor and overall appreciation.

“The tenderness of U.S. beef is the most differentiating quality, regardless of the cut and the country of origin,” said Brook. “The U.S. products always finished ahead of the international competitors, regardless of the cut.”

Brook noted that U.S. striploin and top blade cuts took turns finishing No. 1, while the U.S. flank steak was a consistent third. Argentina's striploin and the Irish product finished next, followed by the German beef and the French.

Argentina's steaks were graded down for tenderness while the Irish beef earned lower marks for texture. Lack of tenderness or hardness was cited as reasons for grading the French and German steaks lower. The texture of the French striploins was noted as an issue by more than half of those surveyed.

“The distinctive taste and texture of U.S. beef was recognized by the survey participants,” said Brook. Nearly 40 percent of the participants correctly identified U.S. top blade and U.S. flank steak as being American.”

For most other countries, less than 15 percent of participants recognized the country of origin based on the taste. The exception was France, which finished last, where 21 percent correctly identified the steak as being French.

The survey, conducted by the French market research company NumSight, took place in October at the SIAL international food and beverage trade exhibition, which attracted 5,500 exhibitors and more than 147,000 trade-only visitors representing 188 countries. Participants from more than 50 countries around the world took part in the survey. Funding for the USMEF-sponsored competition was provided by the Beef Checkoff Program and the USDA Market Access Program (MAP).

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The U.S. Meat Export Federation ([www.USMEF.org](http://www.USMEF.org)) is the trade association responsible for developing international markets for the U.S. red meat industry. It is funded by USDA; the beef, pork, lamb, corn and soybean checkoff programs, as well as its members representing nine industry sectors: beef/veal producing & feeding, pork producing & feeding, lamb producing & feeding, packing & processing, purveying & trading, oilseeds producing, feedgrains producing, farm organizations and supply & service organizations.

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