

Jake Worcester – Manhattan Meat Market

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to New York City to a high-end restaurant and order a Braveheart steak. The steak is delicious. These steaks are available in high quality restaurants across the country – but there is only one place in the nation where a person can get one of these steaks to cook at home. That place is not Manhattan, New York, but Manhattan, Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jake Worcester and his partners are the owners of Manhattan Meat Market in Manhattan, Kansas. Jake and his friends wanted high quality, locally-sourced meat so they started this meat market of their own.

Jake grew up on a farm in northwest Kansas where his family consumed meat they raised themselves. (That takes the “know your farmer, know your food” concept to a whole new level!) Jake was active in 4-H and FFA, went to K-State where he was elected student body president, served as Kansas assistant secretary of agriculture, and now is President and CEO of the Kansas 4-H Foundation.

“We noticed a resurgence of interest in specialty meats and local meat products,” Jake said. In recent years, he talked about this with friends and former co-workers at the Kansas Department of Agriculture and elsewhere. In order to respond to this consumer demand, Jake and these friends opened Manhattan Meat Market in June 2017.

“Our goal is to provide great local products with great customer service to the Manhattan community,” Jake said. “In a larger sense, we also want to tell the story of Kansas farmers and ranchers who have such a great product,” he said.

“Our first decision was that we wanted to distribute Braveheart beef,” Jake said. These steaks are produced by the Beef Marketing Group in Kansas and typically go to high-end restaurants including Harry's in Manhattan and many on the east coast. Manhattan Meat Market is the first in the country where a consumer can buy those steaks and cook them on his or her own grill.

“Our second decision was that we wanted to feature local producers – and we mean local,” Jake said. For example, Manhattan Meat Market offers many products grown in rural Riley, Pottawatomie, and surrounding counties. These include lamb from Glenn Brunkow near Westmoreland, meat goats from Brenda Jordan at Riley, bison from Rick Eyestone near Junction City, and pork from Josh Wendland near Barnes, population 159 people. Now, that's rural.

These products are supplemented with other products as needed, such as additional pork from Nebraska and seafood from the coasts. The meat is brought in to Manhattan Meat Market as primal or sub-primal cuts. There is no slaughtering done at Manhattan Meat Market. The store offers pre-packaged products or the staff can custom-cut an order.

“Because we don't have mass volume, we're able to get to know and serve our customers,” Jake said. The store also offers related products such as rubs and sauces and local favorites such as Alma Cheese and Holy Goat Creamery cheese, plus much more. Occasionally, items such as striped bass and steelhead salmon are available.

One partner, Chad Bontrager, helps source products through his ownership of locker plants in Frankfort and Meriden, plus Yoder Meats. “We’ve got the right kind of team to serve the customer,” Jake said.

“If there’s a place in Kansas to buy great meat, Manhattan ought to be the place,” Jake said. “We’re situated in the Flint Hills next to the nation’s leading land-grant university and one of the country’s finest meat science departments,” he stated.

Food safety and quality are top priorities. “We want to help educate people that the U.S. food system is the safest in the world,” Jake said. The focus is also on superior quality and service. “We believe there is a market for high-end, locally-sourced, premium product,” Jake said.

For more information, go to www.mhkmeats.com.

It’s time to leave New York City where we found a steak that can only be purchased for home use in Manhattan, Kansas. We salute Jake Worcester and all those involved for making a difference with entrepreneurship in the protein business. Manhattan Meat Market is a place where high quality and customer service can meet.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.