

There are some very strict guidelines in place on what we can and cannot label on a box of American Wagyu Beef. Our box is labeled Premium Wagyu Beef and also American Kobe Style Beef. The labels on our box of beef that the restaurant gets allow them to put on their menu just what it says on our box. Our boxes are USDA approved from top to bottom.

In all of the customers that I deal with I cannot think of one who is trying to mislead the public into thinking the American Kobe they are eating is actually Japanese. If they did mislead the consumer, they would be setting themselves up for failure with the public and almost certain disaster with the local food critic. Currently USDA allows the use of the word Kobe as long as a descriptive word is in front of it other than Japanese, i.e.

American Kobe Style, Australian Kobe etc. etc. Japan does not have a trademark on the name Kobe at this time although there is plenty of speculation that they are trying. The issue is whether we here in this country would ever have to abide with rules incorporated in Japan anyway.

Right now the Japanese take great pride, it seems, to label American beef however they want. Some have been accused of bringing in American Beef and Australian beef and labeling Japanese. Kobe was just a nickname we as tourist gave the beef years and years ago.

Some say that the American soldiers, sent there after the bomb and surrender had tried the beef at the port of Kobe, Japan where they were stationed and even though the Wagyu beef came from all over Japan, they told their buddies, families, and anybody and everybody they talked to how great that beef from Kobe was. It eventually went from the beef from Kobe to Kobe Beef, or so the stories go.

I have honestly not had one customer try to mislead their customers by menu descriptions and almost every one of them asks us what they can and cannot say. We deal with customers in every state in the country as well as several countries outside of America so I am not just talking about a few.

Anyway having filled you in on the labeling issue I will fill you in on the Wagyu industry in America. Currently there are two different types of Wagyu cattle raised in this country for meat purposes, Full blood and Percentage Blood Wagyu, 50% Wagyu or higher. USDA mandates that for the beef to be considered for Wagyu labeling it has to have at least 50% Wagyu in the animal to be harvested. Just in case you are about to say Ah Ha, these cattle are mixed with other breeds, Japan has plenty of 50% production of Wagyu themselves, mostly crossing Wagyu with Holsteins. Just because the cattle are full blood does not mean all the carcasses are going to be high in marbling. Some are and some are not, just like with the 50% Wagyu, some are as high in marbling as the full blood and some are not. The same is true in Japan. I think people think that all it has to be is Wagyu and it's meat is off the charts. Well Wagyu are the same as Angus and any other breed out there, some are some that are high quality and some that are not.

What is happening here and Japan is that the carcass itself is not marketed on the fact it is full Wagyu or half Wagyu but rather by how high of quality the beef is. In Japan they grade the carcass on Marbling, (BMS Marbling Chart), Lean color, and Fat color. If the quality of all three are high on their respected charts, they will make A5 on their grading system. If it is lower in quality it could grade A3 or even as low as B3. Here in America, very few Wagyu Meat companies market off the USDA grade but rather they set their own grading system and sell the beef that way. Most have at least two different grades and each is based off a range on the BMS Japanese Marbling Chart. Keep in mind, our customers need to feel they bought a value and if we graded and priced it different than what it was, we would not have very much repeat business, would we? The moral of that statement is that I believe that all of the Wagyu Meat companies in America are doing a very respectable job of sorting and grading and marketing their products based on quality. I cannot speak for the Australian Wagyu product as they have a complete different grading system they use based off the BMS Japanese Marbling Chart but they have added their own twist to it making it their own. For example an American Wagyu steak that is graded BMS 8 is not the same as an Australian BMS 8. They have different levels of marbling. Also there is not an age restriction on cattle getting graded by their government as with ours. Our

cattle have to be under 30 months of age to receive a quality grade by USDA. The reason this is important is the fact the biggest difference in the Wagyu breed compared to all the other breeds is the marbling mechanism on a Wagyu never shuts off. The longer they are fed the more the marbling. This is not true of Angus or any other breed. I have honestly seen complete white steaks on cattle that were 60 months of age and were in a feedlot for four years. Now this does not mean that it is better to eat because of all the marbling, it depends on how tough and fibrous the lean tissue has become because of age. There is a reason we, in this country, have different categories of beef, a fed cattle market and a cow market. Cow meat is much tougher because of its age and should not be included in sales of the much higher quality fed cattle beef.

Back when we were first starting to have American raised Wagyu cattle ready for harvest we all had visions of competing with Japan. The Japanese Wagyu was the only thing we could compare to. That strategy proved to be wrong.

I believe we all know there is a definite difference in American Kobe and Japanese Kobe and I am sure the consumer can tell the difference as well.

Now, I am not saying that one is better than the other, but rather there is a difference. For example if I am a restaurant chef who has a customer who just ordered a 16 ounce Kobe steak, I would send out an American version.

If they wanted a small serving as in traditional Japanese dishes like Shabu Shabu and Sukiyaki, say 3 ounces or less, I would use the Japanese product.

The big difference between the two is the richness of the beef. We can produce certain carcasses that would be just as rich as the Japanese product but not as consistent as they do. Mostly this is true because of the amount of time they feed their cattle as well as different breeds of Wagyu compared to ours. If you served a 16 ounce A5 Japanese Wagyu Steak to a customer, the first third of the steak would be the most incredible dining experience he ever had, but the final two thirds of the steak would eat like beef fat.

The customers pocketbook would be completely depleted for the experience.

The American version would be an incredible dining experience for the whole

16 ounces compared to eating a normal prime graded steak. It has the same buttery taste as the Japanese product just not as rich. That is why we tell our customers that in a steak version we think you will have more satisfied customers with the American version than the Japanese A5 at a much more affordable price. Now, in a small serving, pardon my French, the Japanese

A5 would kick the American version's ass. It is kind of like foie gras. An ounce is incredible but 6 ounces turns to duck liver.

As far as feeding Wagyu cattle here in America, there are those who are feeding for the highest marbling they can get and those who are concerned with delivering a value to their customers. The first feed their cattle way past 30 months like they do in Japan and still with mixed quality results.

They will have more higher end carcasses but they could lose a little bit of tenderness because of it. We tend to feed our Wagyu cattle to deliver a value to our customers. We still feed about 100 to 150 days longer than typical commodity cattle. We have some cattle segregated for longer feeding to take care of the customers we have that want the highest marbling they can get their hands on regardless of price. These customers are typically offering smaller type portions to their customers. No producers here feed sake or beer to their cattle and nobody is giving their cattle massages, just so we are clear. In Japan the small Wagyu farmers still do massage and feed beer but for most of the Wagyu production in Japan, science has caught up and they feed very typical American style diets, just for a longer feeding period. The Japanese Agriculture minister just came out with a new guideline on feeding their Wagyu cattle, only to 24 months. Some are

listening but most are not. In today's economy it is hard to justify spending more and more money trying to chase the ultimate carcass. The story behind the massage and feeding of beer in Japan is quite simple.

Because of the longer feeding program they use and the small space they have to feed cattle in, the cattle tend to become listless and bored. When this happens they quit eating their feed like they normally do. Some day they eat, some days they do not. When a beef animal limits its feed consumption something has to replace the loss of energy to just walk around the pen and maintain. This typically comes from using energy from within their body in the form of intramuscular fats, or marbling. If you deplete the feed too long the meat becomes void of marbling, even on Wagyu cattle. So the Japanese farmers would try to stimulate their cattle eating pattern by massaging them and they would try to encourage feed consumption by putting beer into the feed. Cattle really do like the taste of alcohol. Look at all the alcohol byproducts being fed to cattle all around the world, Corn Gluten, distillers grains, etc. etc. We, in America especially, add these to stimulate consumption so the cattle grow faster and produce higher quality carcasses. I do not know of an American Wagyu meat company who promotes the use of hormones. Hormones speed up the growing process at the expense of marbling. Hormones are exactly the opposite of what Wagyu producers are trying to do with their cattle so they stay away from them.

They are trying to promote marbling not really concerned about extra days.

Just so we are clear, the only time I consider the imported Japanese product competition is when we are talking smaller servings that can be priced by the ounce. As long as there is no price restrictions the consumer is willing to pay, Japanese Kobe is by far better. The American product excels when you put a steak in front of a customer with the expectations that he will eat it all and in this country I believe most Americans enjoy eating a steak like serving over thin sliced 3 ounce servings on a plate. In Japan it is exactly opposite. The average serving size in Japan is 2 to 3 ounces.

A famous chef in Las Vegas, lets just say he is considered to be in the top ten in the world category pulled the Japanese Kobe from his menu and replaced it with American Kobe because he was watching plates come back to the kitchen with steak still on them. When he asked some customers why they were not finishing they told him it was wonderful, just too much. Now the plates are coming back without beef on them and the customers are very happy. To sum it up I believe there is a market for all categories of Kobe, American, Japanese, and Australian. Each has their own niche.