By Dave Zino, Executive Chef

In 2002, the beef checkoff rolled out a training program for the retail industry titled Beef Training Camp. This training kit included a detailed binder, CDs and VHS tapes (remember those?) showing how to cooking videos and merchandising information. The program was very well received.

Seeing the need for similar training in the foodservice sector, the checkoff rolled out Beef University in 2004, a 17 module train the trainer program designed to educate the foodservice professional on all things beef.

It was a two CD kit with fact sheets and PowerPoint presentations.

At the time, we thought the technology for both programs was pretty cool. However, as technology goes, what was cool one year is old hat the next. After careful consideration and as a means to save costs, it was decided to fold in the great information from Beef Training Camp into Beef University. The combined program now lives online as a web-based platform.

Beef University educates retailers and foodservice operators on all facets of beef, from production and product quality to marketing and merchandising. Downloadable tools include PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets and videos—all of which can be used for self-directed education or as part of a customized training session facilitated by beef checkoff staff or utilized within a company’s training program.

Training courses are organized into six sections, making it easy to conduct trainings around a particular topic or present Beef University in its entirety.

In the Raising Beef section, modules include industry history, market information and raising beef. In the Beef Preparation module, handling and storing, beef cookery, and food safety are examined. Beef Basics provides sections on beef flavor, nutrition and a glossary of beef and industry terminology. There is a section on Beef Cuts which covers off on all of the cuts that are available in both the foodservice and retail channels along with the latest nomenclature.

Two new sections are available that were not in the original kit: foodservice-specific and retail-specific. In the foodservice section there are modules on menuing, tips for selling more beef and beef and wine pairings. In the retail section, there are modules covering consumer buying behavior, Hispanic marketing, customer service, beef’s value to retailers and beef for the holidays.

The courses are offered as a PowerPoint file, with a corresponding fact sheet that provides talking points on the topic. Simply choose a course topic and click on the corresponding files to get started. Each course takes about 20-30 minutes to complete and includes a brief quiz at the end. In the comments section, users have an opportunity to provide feedback, so we can keep Beef University current and continue to provide the most valuable tool to benefit the industry.

The online community allows users to connect directly with beef subject matter experts, and share feedback on resources and express interest in other educational opportunities. I encourage you to become a member of the Beef University online community by visiting www.BeefUniversity.org or www.BeefFoodservice.com/BeefUniversity.aspx.

“Retail and foodservice operators have a direct connection with the people that consume the beef raised by my family and the entire beef community, and so it’s important that we share the knowledge and insights on the care that goes into raising America’s favorite high-quality protein,” said Sid Vierbred, a beef producer from Washington and chairman of the checkoff’s Value Subcommittee. “Because of this, we saw an opportunity to create a forum for increased engagement with those who are on the front lines serving and selling beef every day. Now that this program lives online, updating and refreshing will be easier and a more efficient use of time and dollars and creates a unique way to have two-way conversations with our audiences about our training programs. Hats off to all who contributed to this valuable (and now virtual) teaching tool.”

Beef and Blue Cheese Stuffed Mushrooms

Total Recipe Time: 40 to 50 minutes

1/2 pound ground beef
1/4 teaspoon salt
36-40 small button or cremini mushrooms (about 1 1/2 to 2 inch diameter)
1/4 cup crumbled blue cheese
1/4 cup soft whole wheat bread crumbs
3 tablespoons minced chives
1/2 teaspoon steak seasoning blend
Minced fresh chives (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Remove and reserve stems from mushrooms. Season mushroom caps with salt; set aside. Mince stems to yield 1/4 cup; discard remaining stems.
2. Combine ground beef, minced stems, blue cheese, bread crumbs, 3 tablespoons chives and steak seasoning. Spoon beef mixture evenly into mushrooms.
3. Place stuffed mushrooms on rack in broiler pan. Bake in 375°F oven 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle with additional chives, if desired.

Makes 36-40 mushrooms

Cook’s Tip: To make soft bread crumbs, place torn bread in food processor or blender container. Cover, pulse on and off to form fine crumbs. One-half slice makes about 1/4 cup crumbs.

Cook’s Tip: Cooking times are for fresh or thoroughly thawed ground beef. Ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F. Color is not a reliable indicator of ground beef doneness.

Nutrition information per serving, using 80% lean ground beef: 20 calories; 1 g fat (1 g saturated fat; 0 g mono-unsaturated fat); 5 mg cholesterol; 49 mg sodium; 1 g carbohydrate; 0.1 g fiber; 2 g protein; 0.8 mg niacin; 0 mg vitamin B6; 0.1 mcg vitamin B12; 0.2 mg iron; 2.2 mcg selenium; 0.4 mg zinc; 5.9 mg choline.

Nutrition information per serving, using 96% lean ground beef: 15 calories; 1 g fat (0 g saturated fat; 0 g mono-unsaturated fat); 5 mg cholesterol; 45 mg sodium; 1 g carbohydrate; 0.1 g fiber; 2 g protein; 0.8 mg niacin; 0 mg vitamin B6; 0.1 mcg vitamin B12; 0.2 mg iron; 2.2 mcg selenium; 0.4 mg zinc; 6.5 mg choline.

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