

# Building a Case for Case-Ready Meats

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*Case ready meats are the growing phenomena in the US meat processing industry.*

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A group of scientists from industry, government, and academia met in Chicago on October 16-17 to discuss current topics and search for challenges.



The Meat Industry Research Conference, which was sponsored by the American Meat Institute Foundation and the American Meat Science Association, featured a session on case-ready meats.

Huston Keith of Keymark Associates pointed out that the sale of case-ready meats has more than doubled in the past three years going from approximately 500 million packages in 1997 to more than 1.2 billion packages in 2000. He predicted sales to reach 2.8 billion by 2005. There is a potential of 9 billion packages. The product sold in greatest volume in case-ready form is ground beef. It outpaced pork for the past three years. Approximate 50 per cent of the ground beef is sold as case-ready. Keith added that food safety and a shortage of meat cutters were the two primary reasons for using case-ready.

Another speaker, Ken Parnell, vice president of meat, seafood, and deli at Wal-Mart, revealed that as of August 15, Wal-Mart was using 100 per cent case-ready beef, pork, and veal.

Brian Smith of Unisource discussed several options that meat processors have in meeting the challenges of case-ready meats. For example, he said that modified atmosphere packaging and the use of master packs can extend shelf-life of meat. Also, he urged meat processors to keep their packaging equipment in top operating condition. He showed several examples where water or meat on the tray phalange or nicks in the seal bar of the film packaging machine can ruin the integrity of the package.

Another speaker in this session Chance Brooks looked at feeding super-nutritional concentrations of vitamin E to beef cattle and the addition of a special, naturally occurring protein lacto-ferrin can extend the shelf-life of case-ready beef. Specifically, he said that feeding high concentrations of vitamin E extends the colour stability of ground beef and steaks by several days.

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