



# NATIONAL PORK MONTH

Leslie Gartrell/The Daily Standard

Miscellaneous pigs from clients wait in a barn for processing at the Winner's Meats processing plant in Osgood.

## Winner's Meats does farm to table

By LESLIE GARTRELL  
lgartrell@dailystandard.com



Winner

OSGOOD — When Robert Winner founded Winner's Meats in 1928, he started out processing beef and pork in his barn for neighbors and friends.

Nearly a century later, the Winner Corporation, doing business as Winner's Meats, has become one of the few agribusinesses that can claim to be farm-to-table.

Will Winner, 36, who oversees pork processing as one of the fourth generation co-owners of Winner's Meats, said they grow their own feed, raise their own livestock in Greenville, process livestock for themselves and others and sell their own retail products.

"We're vertically integrated. We're truly farm to table," he said.

Winner's Meats most popular pork products include their signature marinated pork chops, whole-hog sausages, 13 different flavors of bratwurst and German grits, or goetta, a mixture of meat, oats and spices.

Winner said the processing plant has had several upgrades in the past few years, most notably a 5,000 square foot addition that was added to the processing plant in April 2020. The addition included a new packaging room, shipping room, cooler and freezer, he said.

The plant has also had several upgrades to their machinery. Before, Winner said an employee would use a deli slicer to slice pork belly into bacon strips, a task that would take an entire shift. Now, the company has a machine that can turn a whole pig belly into bacon in far shorter time.

The company also upgraded its packaging process by incorporating a machine with a processing line that can package, portion, seal and separate retail products.

Winner said the plant can process about 12-14 hogs per hour, a laborious task that starts when live hogs arrive at the plant.

Each pig is tattooed with a number before processing to keep them organized and ensure the product goes home with the corresponding owner, Winner said.

A U.S. Department of Agriculture inspector inspects the pigs to make sure they are healthy and ready for processing, making certain none are injured or sick.

Hogs are processed one at a time. The animals are sprayed with water and stunned with an electric stunner behind the ears, mak-

ing them unconscious and unable to feel pain before they are bled out, Winner said.

Once bled out, the carcass is moved to a scald tank where it will turn in a mixture of scalding powder and hot water for three and a half minutes to loosen the hair follicles and beat hair off the skin.

After the carcass has finished its rotation in the scald tank, staff members move it to a table to scrape and singe off any remaining hair follicles around the face and rear, Winner said.

The pig is gutted and the carcass is butterflied open with a splitting rail. An employee checks the animal before another USDA inspector takes a look, he said. The pig is then weighed and sprayed with an acidic rinse to prevent E. coli. The entire process, from stunning the pig to the chiller, takes about 20 minutes, Winner said.

As opposed to beef, which benefits from an aging process of roughly 10-14 days, pork toughens up when left to age, Winner said. Pigs are chilled overnight at 45 degrees before they are processed the next day.

Winner said Winner's Meats tries to use as much of the pig as possible to make a better return on investment and reduce waste.

The average market hog weighs about 280 pounds, he said. The rule of thumb is to get about 55% of the live weight back in product.

The company's beloved whole-hog sausage comes from all cuts of the animal, he said, including the ham, loin, belly and shoulder.

Classic Thanksgiving hams come from the rear of the pig, while pork chops are cut from the loin, Winner said. Pork belly is sliced and cured to make bacon.

Pork butts, which he explained is the actually the shoulder, can be turned into roasts, shoulder steaks or pulled pork.

During the summer months, Winner said the company sells whole-hogs for hog roasts which usually cook for 10-14 hours. He said Winner's Meats is one of the few processors that still sells whole hogs for roasting, as many processors don't have the capability to scald the carcass to remove hair.

When butchering any animal, one main goal is to reduce waste. With



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Above, packaged products are ready to be shipped to customers. Below, the processing room where pigs are turned into pork chops, roasts, loins and other products. Bottom, a bag of Winner's Meats famous marinated pork chops sits in a cooler.

pork, Winner said ears can be turned into dog treats, ham bones can be smoked for soups and stocks, fat can be rendered into lard and miscellaneous meat can be made into German grits.

"Every aspect of the animal is used," he said.

Whatever can't be used, such as the blood, guts and other inedible parts of the animal, is taken by G.A. Wintzer & Son Co. of Wapakoneta, Winner said.

Once the pig has been butchered, Winner's Meats labels products with custom labels provided by clients, Winner's Meats own private label or labels for individual customers, he said.

Winner's Meats is proud to say their products contain no fillers, he said — their products have been made strictly of beef and pork since the company started as a custom butcher in 1928.

For some people, cooking pork can be difficult. Pork can easily turn dry if cooked for too long, he said.

Winner said pork should be cooked to 145 degrees rather than 165 degrees to ensure juicy, flavorful pork every time.

Fresh pork products stay good for about week, Winner said. After that, pork products can be frozen for around five months before running the risk of developing freezer burn.

