



## On-farm butchery: a stress-free method that results in better beef

RICHARD CORNISH July 19 2019



Four of the Provenir founders, from left, Phil Larwill, Chris Balazs, Jayne Newgreen and Christopher Howe. *Photo: Supplied*

Chris Balazs is a farmer who wanted to share his most tender and most delicious beef with the rest of the world. But the law would not let him.

The former scientist and zoologist raised free-range beef on his farm on the banks of the Moorabool River, north-west of the Victorian regional city of Geelong. He sold it at farmers' markets, where it was regarded as very good but his customers could never get their hands on his very best. That was because it was farm killed, which is perfectly legal for family consumption but illegal to sell.

A farm kill "is considered the holy grail of paddock-to-plate meat," Balazs says. "The animal is brought to a yard they are familiar with. They eat some hay on the ground. There is a trained butcher who is also a marksman. Then it's lights out," the farmer-turned-businessman says.



Farmer and Provenir CEO Chris Balazs with the company's mobile processing unit. *Photo: Supplied*

He wanted to emulate this stress-free method of slaughter to improve the eating quality of meat. He explains that the method by which an animal is slaughtered will determine the quality of its meat.

Normally, when animals are trucked to an abattoir, they undergo stress. They are then placed in concrete yards surrounded by hundreds of other bellowing animals. The stress can trigger a fight-or-flight reaction that can cause cattle to use their muscle sugars or glycogen. These sugars are turned into lactic acid by enzymes after the animal is dead and help improve texture and flavour. The worse the conditions, the less the quality of the meat.

Balazs wanted to get rid of all the horrible abattoir conditions and process animals on the farm. He had a vision for an abattoir on wheels that could be driven from farm to farm. To turn the vision into reality proved to be a mammoth task that took years, and involved miles of red tape.

With the help of SproutX agricultural accelerator, he teamed up with a vet, a chef, a restaurateur, a barrister and a businessman. Two years ago they formed a company called Provenir and attracted \$1 million in private investment and \$700,000 in co-funding from Meat & Livestock Australia. "That was a great stamp of approval from the industry looking to secure a more diverse meat industry," Balazs says.

It took a year to build the mobile processing unit, housed inside a truck trailer. It involves special technology and animal psychology to keep the cattle calm, and all operations are covered by video cameras. The truck is driven to the farm and the cattle loaded from yards into the trailer. "The reduction in stress on the animals is amazing," Balazs says.

Provenir teams up with ethical farmers who have a high standard of herd care and raise their cattle on grass. The first Provenir on-farm processing unit started

operating on a farm in southern NSW in June. On-farm processing in Victoria requires an amendment to the law.

The carcasses are taken to Provenir's butchery at Bannockburn and hung to tenderise the meat. The meat is butchered, packed and delivered directly to the homes of customers, selected butchers and a handful of restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne.

Guy Grossi, from Grossi Florentino in Melbourne, has been a long-term supporter of the project and has started recipe testing with beef cheeks cooked in red wine. "It is awesome," Grossi says.

Darren Robertson from Three Blue Ducks in Sydney, Brisbane and Byron Bay says: "This is really cool. To have a product like this, with such a high level of animal welfare, in Australia, it's just brilliant!"

The result is some of the best yearling beef we have tasted. A sirloin steak, grilled medium-rare, then rested, had surprisingly deep flavour for yearling beef but was also very tender and juicy. The fat was full-flavoured and fresh tasting. Even the mince was remarkably good.

Robertson adds: "It really is stunning beef. We have tried prime cuts plus the tail, tongue and heart. The quality of all of it was really impressive."

Details: [provenir.com.au](http://provenir.com.au)