**Locally bred Wagyu Cattle love a beer on a hot day!**



Rare and in demand see the article & video

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Akimaru rolls out her enormous tongue and begins licking Ken Kurosawatsu’s bare arm. He hardly blinks at the very moist show of affection.

There’s nothing personal going on here. It’s strictly business. Kurosawatsu is the boss and his fortunes are very much tied to how Akimaru does her job. And that would be making babies — more specifically embryos of Wagyu cattle that Kurosawatsu can sell around the world.

Akimaru, you see, is a Wagyu herself, a red Wagyu, one of a rare and much-in-demand breed. She’s just one of 130 head currently being raised here on Wagyu Sekai, a 100-acre family farm just off Highway 6 in Puslinch.

Some of her barn mates, like the black Wagyu across the aisle, have a very different fate ahead of them. They’ll wind up, within the next few months, on the tables of some expensive restaurants. In some cases, they may be mistakenly called “Kobe” beef, and certain diners will happily lay out $80 or $100 for a single small steak.

“Wagyu is the breed of cattle,” Kurosawatsu says. “Kobe beef is a name but in Japan it has legal status. The animal must be a Wagyu raised, fed and processed in Hyogo prefecture, of which Kobe is the capital. Here there is no protection of the Kobe name.”

He explains that the term “Kobe beef” is better known to consumers, so some vendors use it. But he is meticulous in avoiding the term. Kurosawatsu is the only farmer in Ontario raising full-blood Wagyu cattle exclusively. That means all his cattle — heifers, bulls and steers — are descended from the original Japanese Wagyu herd. Many, perhaps most, of the other Wagyu raised by a dozen or so farmers in the province are crossbreeds of Wagyu and western cattle such as Angus.

That causes a genetic difference in the animals and can affect the quality of the meat. Wagyu beef is famed for its intense marbling of fat and rich flavour. It is often referred to as “melting in your mouth.”

“Raising Wagyu is something of an art,” Kurosawatsu adds. “To be successful, it’s 70 per cent breeding genetics and 30 per cent diet — how, when and what the animal is fed.” He says of the two types of Wagyu, red and black, the latter is by far the superior, with better marbling and greater consistency.

He says that emphasis on purity of breeding and special diet, as well as the fact that Wagyu are smaller and take longer to grow than some other beef breeds, helps account for the cost of the meat.

The Kurosawatsu family farm started in 1984. The first Wagyu were brought over in 1994. Ken, who was born in Canada, took over the farm in 1998. Before that, he spent several years working in Japan for a major Wagyu company and later managing their Seattle office.

Although the family won numerous top prizes for their Holsteins, Kurosawatsu decided in 2009 to switch to Wagyus alone. His parents returned to live in Japan, and he currently runs the entire operation himself with an occasional helper.

As the weather gets better, the cattle come out of the spacious main barn and are allowed to wander the fields and forage for themselves. Kurosawatsu expects about 30 new head when calving takes place in June and July, and every one of those babies is already sold. They will go either to breeding or to meat production. Bulls that go to breeding are housed separately. The other males are castrated — “testosterone ruins the marbling,” Kurosawatsu says — and live out their days as steers.

Stories about how Wagyu should be raised include massaging the cattle to get better marbling and feeding them beer. “Massaging doesn’t help marbling,” Kurosawatsu says. “Genetics and diet determine that. But I do feed them beer in summer. When it gets really hot and humid out, the animals stop eating and start to lose weight. I give them each a can of Sleeman’s and it helps kick start something in their metabolism so they begin to feed again.”

Beef Wagyu usually go to slaughter at 36 months old. For the first two years they are fed on things like hay, grass and silage corn. “For the last year they basically switch over to soy beans, barley and wheat bran,” Kurosawatsu says. “That helps the fat in the meat to turn white.”

Kurosawatsu says he typically sends two animals a month for meat. They are shipped to Highland Packers in Stoney Creek. The various cuts are distributed to places such as Jacob & Co. steak house in downtown Toronto, Famu Japanese butcher in Markham, and the newly opened Fin izakaya bar in Oakville.

Kurosawatsu and his fiancée, Rie Enomoto, have just opened Wa’s, a summer hotdog cart featuring wieners made from his Wagyus. Wa’s will be in Aberfoyle at 2 Brock Road, northwest corner of Highway 6 and Wellington County 34, Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2: 30 p.m.

Kurosawatsu says he still has a soft spot for the cattle. “It took a while for me to raise animals for meat,” he says. “It was hard the first time. Now I just look after them to the best of my ability.”

That emotion is why those animals earmarked for the table do not get names, while the breeders do. Among them is Rikiharu, a black cow that turns 19 this summer and has the distinction of being the first full-blood Wagyu ever born outside Japan, right here at Wagyu Sekai.

It’s also a reason for the small gold-painted statue of Buddha sitting on a rock just outside the big barn. “It’s to honour the sacrifice of life for business,” Kurosawatsu says.