



Photos courtesy of Certified Angus Beef

STEAK A BOW

These steak strips, made of Certified Angus beef, wowed the crowd.

► **THE DEMOGRAPHIC:** Certified Angus Beef Steak Strips — flame-broiled, seasoned and sliced — is one of three fully cooked, frozen steak strip products introduced by John Soules Foods. With more families eating in but still limited on time, this product is a convenient, fast and easy lunch or dinner for families on the go. We distributed the Steak Strips to families across demographic sectors.

► **FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** The Steak Strips come frozen in 1-pound bags with five 3-ounce servings. The packaging is minimal — re-sealable plastic with a photograph of what the contents look like when prepared. “I liked the pictures on the front. It made it look really expensive and high quality.” “The package was very attractive and easy to open.”

Once opened, some said the strips appeared “dull compared to the picture on the package” because of the “condensation and frost on the product.” If the steak was thawed before the bag was opened, the meat looked like the photo on the bag, but if still frozen the meat

was in grayish pieces that almost looked like pre-formed meat. This seems to account for the disparity in testers’ reports of the product’s appearance. It has a fairly clean label and good numbers on the nutrition facts, although the

sodium is a little high for health-conscious consumers.

► **PREPARATION:** Many people used the suggestions on the package for Steak Salad or Beef Fajita Quesadillas, or they

PREMIUM AND EASY



THE PRODUCT: Launched in June, John Soules’ Certified Angus Beef Steak Strips join the company’s Carne Asada and Philly Cheese Steak varieties in a retail lineup of fully cooked, seasoned and sliced steaks derived from beef of a quality that only 8 percent of carcasses inspected in the United

States achieve. They also are gluten-free. **THE PRICE:** Each 1-pound package sells for a suggested retail price of \$7.99.

THE CUSTOMER: The product is geared for families with a total annual income of more than \$60,000, people who can afford a premium product but would rather save money by eating at home and save time by not cooking.

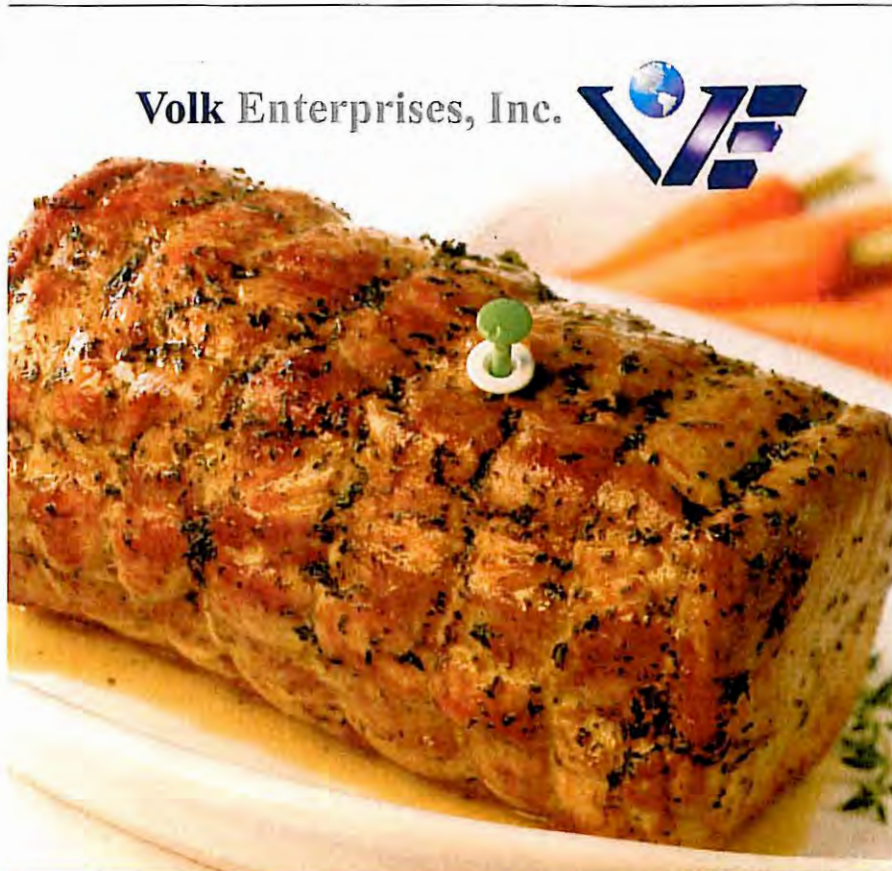
THE PROCESS: What makes Soules’ product stand out, says Mark Soules, co-CEO with his brother John Soules, is that the company uses flame broilers, which give a backyard grill-like flavor, rather than the more standard steam cookers. Steam cookers produce upwards of 20 percent more yield, he says, “but if a customer only buys it once, it doesn’t matter.”

TASTE TEST

made tacos or a stir-fry. Heating instructions on the package are for the steak after it is thawed, which caused some confusion for testers. There are separate instructions for heating to 165 degrees F, yet the suggested recipes did

not include a step for heating the meat. There were no suggestions for how to thaw, as one reviewer mentioned. Another tester was surprised to discover that the heating instructions were for already-thawed meat: "I had everything

ready to go and was ready to toss the meat in the pan when I discovered that I needed to thaw the meat. At that point it was too late so I tossed the meat into a frying pan to thaw and heat." For those who read directions ahead of time, using the steak strips was easy and quick.



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► TASTE AND APPEARANCE:

"Excellent." "The most tender I've ever had!" "Very lean ... not fatty." A couple of tasters said the seasoning turned pasty when the product was heated, and said the meat would have been "better without it." One taster considered the seasoning to be "far too peppery" and another thought the meat "did not bite like real meat — too much over-marination."

► THE UPSHOT:

The steak seems like a winner for its intended market. One young, stay-at-home mom appreciated the time savings. "I liked the fact that for recipes like quesadillas and salad that the steak is already cooked and sliced ... usually the most time-consuming part of either of those recipes, so the steak really saved a lot of time." All of the over-55ers and retirees gave good reviews too.

Meanwhile, the professional chef in the group summed up the product's appeal: "To me it is similar to a fast-food burger — it's not as good as a handmade and grilled burger, but it is really good in its own way." ©

Food-product development veterans Jacqueline Beckley and Cheryl Leach join Meatingplace magazine as regular contributors to MeatingTaste, a consumer sampling of new meat products featured monthly in the publication's Taste Test column. Here's how the sampling program works: The meat item is distributed to consumers, including the product's core demographic, for preparation in their own homes. No instructions are provided to consumers other than to write back their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate its flavor, mouthfeel, texture, packaging and ease of use. Beckley and Leach look for the common threads by using Getting It!, a system developed to listen to consumers about products (Getting It!®). The sampling is not intended to be a true taste test in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of consumers based on their encounters with the product in their home environment.