

A PRIME GIG



Mark Matson FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Tony Sousa is plant manager at Lone Star Food Service, which has a 150-square-foot room where meats are dry-aged. 'A dry-aged steak that I personally select and give the loving touch will have a beefier, more concentrated and robust flavor,' Sousa says.

Tony Sousa's foray into dry-aging beef started as an experiment

By Ricardo Gándara
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Would you believe a butcher who says that dry-aging your steak — basically rotting the meat for 20 to 40 days — will make it taste dramatically better?

Tony Sousa, the plant manager at Lone Star Food Service in East Austin, wants to explain why.

"A dry-aged steak that I personally select and give the loving touch will have a beefier, more concentrated and robust flavor," he says.

Though Sousa, 50, oversees hiring, training and the day-to-day operations of the East Austin meat-processing plant, dry-aging steaks is his thing. "The room is my baby," he says referring to a 150-square-foot room set aside at Lone Star for dry-aging steaks. "This is where we create steaks," he says. "First, butchering is an art, and aging beef is a creative process."

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Lone Star's dry-age room has a padlock on the door to limit access, right away telling you that no one messes with Sousa's baby. Here, 2,000 pounds of beef — rib-eyes, strips and T-bones — rest on metal shelves, each one with a tag

that has the customer's name and number of days that customer wants the meat dry-aged, the date the meat was cut at Lone Star and the date the meat was placed in the room. After the meat is just right, it is driven in refrigerated trucks to restaurants in Austin, Kerrville, Fredericksburg, San Antonio, Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston. In Austin, Sousa's dry-aged steaks can be found at Four Seasons, Steiner Ranch Steakhouse and, occasionally, Olivia, Bess Bistro and South Congress Cafe. "We also send our wet-aged beef to Dan's Hamburgers and Matt's El Rancho," says Sousa.

Lone Star sells only to retailers, but its dry-aged steaks can be found at The Meat House in Austin. The public can order gift boxes at www.lonestarfood.com.

Sousa was raised on a farm in central Brazil, where his family harvested the animals that landed on the kitchen table. He started working

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