

Beef bred on beer grows in Wales

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'Very expensive'

THE world's most expensive cows are being reared on Welsh pastures and could soon be served as a delicacy by top chefs.

Beer-swilling bovines that are massaged with rice wine are all the rage for some of America's A-list celebrities.

During their short lives the cattle are fed only the finest grains and are treated like royalty, and their meat can sell for hundreds of thousands of pounds.

So exquisite is the meat from the Wagyu herd that "Kobe" burgers made from the beef are selling for £26 in some of the finest restaurants around the world.

And by the end of this year one farmer from Pwllheli in North Wales hopes to be supplying the "heavenly" meat.

David Wynne Finch has been breeding the Wagyu cows and importing their meat for three-and-a-half years.

He supplies six restaurants in London, Amsterdam and Brussels with the imported Japanese beef and will soon be able to increase that as his own herd develops and can be sold.

Far from your average joint that might be smothered in mustard or ketchup, this marbled meat is so succulent it needs little accompaniment, according to Mr Wynne Finch.

"It's not really burger meat," he said. "This is prime meat that makes the most unbelievably delicious meals. It's full of unsaturated fats, which give the most sumptuous flavours.

"It's partly the breeding that makes the meat so nice. They are fed on hays and special grains and have huge appetites so are fed for a good deal of time, but they are a little smaller than normal cows and a little more like the Spanish fighting bull.

"And during the summer months when it's hot they are given beer to stimulate their appetites and massaged to keep them happy.

"We hope they're the happiest cows in Wales."

The cows are given plenty of tender loving care in the form of a special massage, but Mr Wynne Finch is keeping his technique to himself.

"It's a special trick of the trade: I

IT may sound like just another gimmick, with diners paying for cows to graze punch-drunk, but Kobe beef from the Japanese Wagyu cows is already proving to be popular around the world.

Graham Tinsley, team captain of the Welsh National Culinary Team and chef patron of the Castle Hotel in Conwy, would certainly be interested in serving up the meat in a range of dishes.

"I've been to Japan twice and it's wonderful beef, but very expensive," he said. "I hear that all the rich and famous are going to the restaurants where they serve it.

"It's like anything: if it's marketable and within the price range of people it will sell, otherwise it will end up as a gimmick. You can't overprice it because you've got to be able to sell it to customers.

"The Welsh team has got some good ties with Japan and I love the country so I would be interested in giving it a shot, especially if it's coming from a Welsh farm."

The vice-captain of the culinary team, Colin Gray, chairman of the South Wales branch of the Welsh Culinary Association, was a little more cautious, however.

"From my point of view it would be far too expensive to get a return on it," said the chef who is setting up a new catering company for corporate dinners and functions, Capital Cuisine, and is general manager of Barons Patisserie in Cardiff Bay.

Mr Gray said the beef could be viewed as a bit of a fad, in the same way that emus and ostriches were once all the rage.

could tell you but I'd have to kill you," he joked.

The meat has so far gained notoriety for making some of the most expensive burgers, but Mr Wynne Finch would rather see it become a delicacy, "the caviar end of beef".

The Old Homestead Steak House in New York, which has served up top-quality organic meat for 15 years, is certainly attracting some high-profile diners.

Catherine Zeta Jones's husband Michael Douglas has been known to sample the Kobe steak and New



PRIME BEEF: Tudweiliog farmer David Wynne Finch with his breed of cattle

Picture: Gerallt Radcliffe

Yorkers have been queuing up to feast on burgers since it was introduced last week.

The Kobe burger is a 20oz monster crammed between bread, herb butter and mushrooms with three sauces – horseradish, home-made ketchup and stone grain champagne mustard – on the side.

Diners at the 117-year-old restaurant, which has also played host to actor Richard Dreyfuss, newscasters and baseball stars, have already eaten their way through 250 portions a day.

At \$41 a go (£26), executive chef

Edward Gozdz says they are such a hit because they are more affordable than a \$100 steak.

"It is the best burger money can buy," he said. "The Kobe cattle eat the finest grain. They are massaged twice a day so fat goes through the animal. These animals can weigh up to 1,800lb with a huge fat content so it tastes very good."

Mr Gozdz, who has worked at 9th Avenue's Old Homestead Steak House for more than a decade, is "currently depleting the national stock by 300lb a day".

"I do not know any other res-

taurant that has Kobe on its menu," he said. "I am sure everyone will be serving it now."

He doubts the meat can currently be imported into the US from either Wales or Japan because of remaining fears about BSE.

"I do not think the US Department of Agriculture will permit that," he said last night. "I am not sure if that's true. That's speculation."

But, if that ban were to be removed he would be willing to look at a sample from David Wynne Finch's herd "and consider it from there".



A KOBE BURGER: A snip for New Yorkers at £26 a time

Picture: John Chapple