

## High-End Natural Pork Market Opens Doors for Young Iowa Farmer

by: Douglas Burns

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ROSELLE - Young Carroll County farmer Scott Sibbel learned the business the old-fashioned way from his father and grandfather.

Sibbel, 26, who lives on a farm 2 miles south of Roselle, with his attorney wife, Martha, and their two kids, blends time-honored animal husbandry with the Internet age to market all-natural hogs to California-based Niman Ranch, a high-end natural meat company.

"They are pro-family and sustainable agriculture," Sibbel said. "Those are values I learned growing up."

For about two years Sibbel has operated a farrow-to-finish business with about 30 sows and three boars. He markets around 400 to 500 pigs to Niman annually -- and figures he makes several dollars more per pig.

"Usually I make at least \$20 more," Sibbel said.

In terms of feed costs, raising Niman hogs is about the same as in more traditional operations, Sibbel said. But the work does involve more animal husbandry, more labor costs and bedding costs for straw.

The Niman hogs he raises receive no antibiotics, fishmeal or bloodmeal, and they are on all-vegetarian diets.

Niman Ranch certifies his farm and sends a representative to check on the operation periodically.

"My goal is to sell them all to Niman Ranch," Sibbel said. "All the hogs I can sell directly to Niman Ranch. They're always looking for more guys."

Sibbel said Niman treats its farmer-suppliers well, setting floor prices to ensure continued flow of the hogs even in tough markets.

"They make sure they take care of their suppliers," Sibbel said.

Sibbel, a son of Tom Sibbel and grandson of Ray Sibbel, lives on the family's 240 acres in the Roselle area.

"Actually, I learned about Niman Ranch from my wife because she was involved in agricultural law," Sibbel said.

Although Sibbel said people can feel free to contact him about Niman, he said it would be more direct to contact the Niman Ranch's Iowa office:

Niman Ranch - Pork division  
P.O. Box 430  
113 North Akir, Suite E  
Latimer, IA 500452  
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Niman Ranch started in the early 1970s, when Bill Niman began raising livestock on 11 acres in a small coastal town just north of San Francisco. He raised his animals using traditional, humane husbandry methods and wholesome natural feeds. Before long, Niman began selling his beef to local grocery stores and to restaurants where chefs were asking to put the flavorful beef on their menus.

Niman recalls those days as "moving toward a future that looks more like the past" -- a time when flavor and quality came first and farmers and ranchers were proud stewards of their animals and their land. The business grew steadily as word got around -- and soon distribution spread throughout California and beyond.



A chef serving Niman Ranch beef introduced Niman to her cousin, Jeanne McCormack, a lamb farmer in California who raised lamb in the same way Niman raised cattle. Realizing they shared similar commitments and passions, McCormack joined to become Niman Ranch's first lamb farmer in 1992.

In 1995, McCormack introduced Niman to her friend Paul Willis, owner of Willis Free Range Pig Farm in Iowa. Willis wanted to revitalize sustainable hog farming methods in the Midwest. His commitment to raise hogs in a humane, old-fashioned way matched Niman Ranch's own principles. As demand for all-natural meats spread, Willis' deliciously tender, well-marbled pork found a ready market among chefs and food lovers.

Today, the Niman Ranch network has grown to include more than 600 independent American farmers and ranchers. Whether they raise hogs, beef or lamb, they all share Niman Ranch's dedication to strict protocols and the belief that all-natural, humane and sustainable methods produce great flavor.

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