



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly praises Navajo Beef and hard work of Navajo ranchers



Left to right, Cattle buyer Billy Hall, Navajo Gaming CEO Derrick Watchman, President Shelly, Labatt chief operating officer Al Silva, and Navajo rancher Elwood Pahi of 14R Ranch Corp. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

BERNALILLO, N.M.—Since 2011, the Navajo Beef initiative has been growing and offering unmatched culinary delights at casinos owned and operated by Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise.

On Feb. 10, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly met with representatives of NNGE and Labatt Food Service at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort at Santa Ana Pueblo to discuss progress with the Navajo Beef program.

The group dined on Navajo Beef prepared by the executive chef of the Corn Maiden Restaurant for a high class dining experience that was one part celebration and one part demonstration.

Joining in the dinner were representatives from NNGE, Labatt, Navajo ranchers participating in the program and board members from gaming.

The Labatt Premium Verified Native American Beef program partners select Navajo ranchers with Navajo casinos. The company has expanded their program to include other tribes

and pueblos.

Navajo cattle is purchased, placed on to feed and ultimately processed into boxed beef items upon market readiness. The beef is then distributed to Navajo casinos to be enjoyed by the consumer.

Local Navajo ranchers ship their cattle to feedlots owned by Billy Hall, a cattle buyer who owns the number one certified Angus feedlot in the country. From there, cattle are shipped to a harvest facility and then to direct source meat processing facilities.

Finally, Labatt distributes the beef to casinos, schools, travel and health centers in the southwest. “Navajos supporting Navajos” is the overarching theme.

President Shelly said the Navajo Beef initiative is not only a source of pride, but also a tremendous opportunity for self-sufficiency.

“For generations, we have known that livestock is an important Navajo way of life that must be preserved,” President

Shelly said. “By working with our partners at Navajo Gaming Enterprise and Labatt, we are enriching our tribal economy and traditional way of life.

“We look forward to growing this partnership for the generations to come,” he added.

Labatt is the eighth largest broad line food service distributor nationally, said Al Silva, chief operating officer of Labatt Food Service.

Silva said the idea to incorporate Navajo Beef into the menus of Navajo casinos was an important step to prove the quality of the meat. The decision by NNGE to become the first customer for Navajo Beef has opened the door to other opportunities like tribal schools and hospitals.

The partnership connects producers with consumers and Navajo cattle ranchers are able to market their cattle at a premium and increase their bottom line for economic stability.

In 2013, Navajo ranchers had a ranching economic impact of \$439,768 through sales of their cattle. In 2014, that number increased by 15 percent to \$745,940 for 236,000 pounds of usable meat harvested.

In 2014, there were 481 head of cattle in the Navajo Beef Program. For 2015, that number grew to 561 and estimates for future project continued growth.

Silva said, “You can see the product is superior to anybody else’s product. There’s no apology there.”

The steaks served at the dinner were flavorful and marbled with succulent cuts of tenderness that Silva says is unmatched because of ranching

techniques incorporating a low stress environment and low antibiotic use.

Navajo ranchers are literally doting on their head of cattle, Silva said, ensuring they are vaccinated, watered and fed. They are herded by cattlemen on foot or on horseback, which reduces the stress on the cattle and in turn means a tender meat product.

“A calf needs a booster shot like your kid needs a booster shot,” Silva said.

Proper vaccinations mean the cattle are less susceptible to diseases and illnesses. Healthy cattle equals weight increase and a superior product for the growing niche market of Navajo Beef.

Last year, Navajo ranchers averaged \$1,200 per head through the Navajo Beef program, Silva said. Labatt serves Navajo Beef at all Navajo casinos and plans are to pitch the product to other industries on the Navajo Nation.

President Shelly is proud of the Navajo Beef initiative and said the steak was the best he’s ever tasted.

“Where’s the beef? It’s on Navajo,” he said.

Navajo Beef won the People’s Choice Award at the Arizona Indian Gaming Association Expo Cook Off in 2014.

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