

# THE CRAFT BUTCHER



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# UNCLE BEEF



Meeting South Africa born and raised Steve (AKA Uncle Beef) it's hard to believe that he hasn't been working in the meat industry his whole life. He is unerringly knowledgeable about his product range, passionate about meat quality and animal welfare, and entrepreneurial in spirit.

Yet until a few years ago Steve, who has an Honours degree in Business and Management, worked in the city within the security industry. It wasn't until 2020 and a chance restructure of the company he worked for that he was able to 'escape' and make his side hustle his work, resulting in him opening Uncle Beef not long afterwards.

Steve's side hustle was making Biltong – his favourite meat treat from home. The word Biltong is from the Dutch bil (buttock) and tong (strip or tongue). Steve has been perfecting the art of Biltong making virtually since arriving in England aged 18, and laughingly says his first Biltong dryer was 'rigged up from a storage box with two computer fans and steel rods screwed from side to side to hang the meat from'.

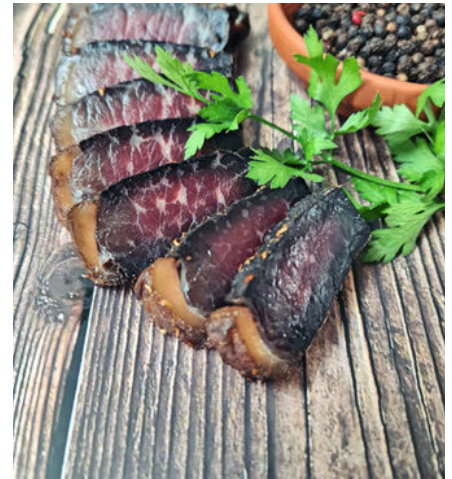
For those not in the know Biltong is a cured beef delicacy, usually produced from silverside, which is marinated in a vinegar brine spiced with salt, pepper, and cracked coriander, before hanging to dry for seven days in a specialist South African Biltong

dryer. These are needed to create the perfect conditions for the drying of the meat. Steve says,

'The art of Biltong making is low humidity and an ambient temperature of around 19 degrees.'

To get as close to the product he remembered from his youth Steve searched first for exactly the right beef, finally settling on grass fed Aberdeen Angus, bought specifically from John Scott Meat in Scotland. This beef has a marbled texture and a thick layer of flavoursome yellow fat. It has proved so popular in the shop that one customer leaving the shop only got as far as the first set of traffic lights before he'd finished it – and immediately turned around to head back and buy some more! Justifiably proud of his product, Steve has entered it into the 2024 Great Taste Awards.

Since that first Biltong Steve has added to the range of South African meat products. He now produces Droëwars, a dried, cured beef sausage flavoured with South African



## SPECIALITY MEATS

spices and encased in a lamb skin. In 2023 Uncle Beef won a silver medal in the World Charcuterie Awards for this product.

Also to be found at Uncle Beef (and another entry into the Great Taste Awards) is their equivalent to a Cumberland Ring, the Boerewars Sausage, meaning 'farmer's sausage'. This 90% meat sausage is made from pork and beef with the addition of Steve's personalised spice blend.

Though selling South African cured meat products was Steve's first love, sales of fresh meat at Uncle Beef now outstrip them. Under the tutelage of a butcher with over half a century of experience Steve has learned butchery skills, and with the help of their apprentice Sebastian, together they have built a butchers shop with an impressive range of fresh meat products.

Some, including their Fillet and Bone Marrow Burger, have recently won Diamond awards in the London Butchers Association product competition.

Steve puts some of his success down to his commitment to sourcing the best quality he can. He buys slow grown, free range chickens

from Sutton Hoo in Norfolk, and hand picks his lamb and pork on weekly visits to Smithfield market, only buying meat of good provenance and reared to high welfare standards. For his Christmas turkeys he even visits the farm himself, before driving up to Norfolk to collect them in person.

An entrepreneur at heart, Steve admits he loves a project. His latest project is acquiring a sausage factory with a business partner. The factory already produces for an established wholesale customer but Steve sees potential to drive the business forward and is eager to develop it.

As if that were not enough, Steve also has a street food truck or Braai unit, called 'Uncle Beef's Street Food', his own Uncle Beef branded Braai spice rub has established relationships with social media influencers (such as @smokeymaysbbq) and plans in place for the first Uncle Beef Smoke BBQ festival next year. It's fair to say that Steve's enthusiasm for butchery, and business, knows no bounds. In his own words,

*'This is only the start. I want to go places and feel I've made a good footprint on the butchery industry. Watch this space!'*



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