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## Southwest MN farmers taking a chance with investing into a different way to sell their cattle — carving out the middle man with e-commerce startup



Photo courtesy of BetterFed Beef

Wabasso farmer Cole Altermatt, left, performs a routine check of his cattle with nutritionist Dr. Tom Peters. Altermatt is one of 17 producer/owners in Minnesota raising cattle for BetterFed Beef e-commerce startup. Peters co-founded direct-to-consumer beef retail company with Max Winders.

**By Mike Lamb**  
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TAUNTON — Luke Gorecki moved from Sioux Falls back to Taunton to work on the family's farm with his brother, Adam, seven years ago.

"Dad kind of wanted to slow down and started to retire, so he moved to town and then we (his family) moved on to the home farm," Gorecki said.

Back then, Gorecki said, most of the farm's cattle went to big companies like Cargill and Tyson. And the cattle had to be transported hundreds of miles to the large slaughterhouses.

"There's only four meat packers and you have cattle to sell. 'This is the price you get, like it or not.' You have to sell them. Once they are ready, they gotta go. You can't keep them for another six months until it gets better," Gorecki said.

"The last few years of COVID and packing plants closing down, it's really gotten bad to the point where the packing plants — these companies that own all the

packing plants — they're making 6 to 800 dollars per head profit. And the farmer is hoping to make 20 to 30 dollars a head. He (the farmer) did 99 percent of the work. It's pretty frustrating," Gorecki said.

But now Gorecki is seeing a shift in the cattle industry. The farm hasn't sold any cattle to those big slaughter operations for a few years now. The cattle are now going to smaller meat packing plants in Minnesota and Iowa. However, Gorecki decided to continue looking for other options.

He's hoping his family found a viable option in a new e-commerce company called BetterFed Beef. It was launched last summer by two men in Paynesville who have worked in the beef industry for decades. Dr. Tom Peters has worked as a consulting beef cattle nutritionist for 35 years. Max Winders recently retired after 28 years in international agriculture.

The new company's mission is to "simply bring a better beef product and a better experience" to families across the United States using an e-commerce platform — BetterFedBeef.com. The website allows

consumers to shop for beef by the cut or by specially curated boxes. The beef is mailed directly to the customer's home, packaged in dry ice. The launching of the company follows the success of now successful grocery platforms such as InstaCart.com, UberEats and DoorDash.

### Cattle farmers become investors

According to the BetterFedBeef.com website, the idea of the e-commerce endeavor was hatched during fishing trips made by Dr. Peters and Winders. On these trips they kicked around the idea of bringing the best beef directly to consumers.

"The model, the vision that we could produce the highest quality of beef in the world, raising from birth to finish is a big portion," Peters says in a website video. "Then after they are harvested and prepared, that is all part of a process that is very important for ensuring the best quality beef."

To get business off the ground, Peters and Winders needed investors, cattle and locker plants. The Goreckis are among 17

investors in Minnesota.

Besides the Gorecki farm, four other investors also raise cattle on farms that are all located within a 30 mile radius from Marshall. The Hesse family farm is near Tyler and two other cattle operations are near Wabasso: The Eis family and Altermatt family.

"We have been working with Dr. Peters. My dad actually was working with him before I moved home," Luke Gorecki said.

Dr. Peters and Winders invited the Gorecki family to become investors. Luke Gorecki recalls those conversations about BetterFed Beef with Dr. Peters

"Once they started talking to us about it — and to other family farms — 'yeah, this sounds like a good idea. We'd definitely be interested in being part of it,'" Luke Gorecki said.

Besides being investors, the Gorecki farm recently sent six head of cattle to one of the meat locker plants that have been contracted to process the beef.

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