

## **“Badman’s Barbecued Brisket”**

by Chuckwagon

Years ago, the two muscles between the front legs of a cow (brisket) was an inexpensive cut and not exactly what one would call a “hot selling item” in any butcher shop. Why? Because of its location, it is naturally tough. And who wanted tough beef? Not the ordinary housewife. Butchers couldn’t even give the stuff away! However, over time, people learned a little secret of barbecuers and cattlemen. It seems that these folks would “bake” it in light smoke for 12 hours at only 200°F. and then cut it against the grain in thin slices. The flavor was (and is) phenomenal. An enterprising butcher in nineteenth century New York, called the stuff “London Broil” desiring to bump up the label for quick sale.

Being naturally sturdy, the brisket contains two distinct muscles separated by a layer of fat that will not render. Worse, the meat absorbs smoke like a sponge, and may easily become bitter to the palate of many folks. It is also so large, it requires a longer period of cooking time, and most chefs and cooks consider its preparation without drying the meat, a legitimate challenge. The brisket may very well be the most difficult piece of beef of all to barbecue, and the process of selecting, preparing, and barbecue-cooking brisket in many parts of the United States is truly an art form, remaining in a culinary class by itself - often chosen only to display the skills of a good chef. Inside a working ranch barbecue pit, properly cooked brisket habitually becomes a matter of economy, using all the parts of a steer.

In the marketplace, the secret is out! Brisket is not only sought by barbecuers, it is much in demand during the springtime for those who make an annual “corned beef” dish for St. Patrick’s Day on March 17th. Yes, the secret has been out for some time and the law of supply and demand has made the price skyrocket. Allow me to share a few secrets I've learned along the trail to turn this “tough stuff” into a delicious meal.

Selecting the best brisket from a butcher’s cold case is almost a combination of skill and luck and cookin' the ominous article may seem as if a miracle were needed. On the range, you may choose and cut an eight to ten pound brisket from a medium size beef, having checked the cut for flexibility - and the brand on the steer!:roll: Place your hand vertically beneath the center of the butchered brisket and let the brisket “flop” over the edges of your hand. As with the selection of tenderloin, find a pliable cut with a natural bend. If it is tough coming from the meat locker or butcher shop, it will be difficult to make it more tender on the barbecue grill.

The large end of the brisket is called the “point”. Place the brisket on a cutting board and remove the outside fat from the brisket's backside with a boning knife. This layer will not render drippings and is hard, tough, and often slightly yellow in color. With a boning knife, cut the thing almost to the muscle so there is only a slight amount of fat remaining. It will look mostly red with just a bit of fat remaining. Yes, there is much waste in preparing a good brisket.

### **Seasoning The DERNED Thing**

The fat at the front of the brisket is handled a little differently. Notice two things. First, how deeply you must cut into the fat layer of the brisket in order to remove the maximum amount of fat separating the two muscles. This fat layer invariably remains in the center traveling the length of the brisket, separating the two muscles. Second, note the inch thick layer of fat along the bottom of the brisket. This layer will vary anywhere from 1/4 inch to about 1 inch in thickness. If you select a brisket with the 1/4-inch of fat trimmed along this side, you must thank your butcher, as it certainly did not come that way. Be sure to send him a Christmas card and don’t ride yer’ hoss inside his store any longer while screaming “yee-haw”! The goal is to trim this fat edge to about 1/4 inch in

thickness, offering a protective layer during the long period of cooking. Although this hardened fat will not render, it will help keep the meat moist while preventing it from absorbing too much strong smoke smudge, becoming overly bitter or having too strong a smoke flavor.

Now that you've selected the best brisket and have trimmed it to perfection, it's time to season the meat. Some folks choose to marinate the brisket, being aware the process only penetrates the meat to a depth of about 1/4 inch and won't penetrate fat at all. Whenever cooking a hefty piece of meat this robust, marinating is not all that effective, although I use marinade to introduce as much garlic flavor as possible, prior to sprinkling the meat with a spicy "dry rub".

Folks in the southern and eastern United States, apply a thick coating of ordinary yellow mustard to the meat by "painting" it with a pastry brush before the dry rub seasoning is applied. Some of these brisket-bakin' barbecuers are the finest in the country and their plain ol' yellow prepared mustard helps keep the meat moist, keeps the dry rub on the brisket, and seals the meat by developing a tender crust. The vinegar within the mustard will also help tenderize the meat to a slight degree. The mustard flavor dissipates entirely during the cooking process. Believe me, if you are really seeking "competition brisket", you'll spread on mustard.

In the Rocky Mountains, by tradition, most ranch cooks simply skip the mustard for some reason, usually preferring to "smoke-cook" briskets for hours inside low-temperature smoke houses using light smoke for only a short period during the actual cooking time. Rocky Mountain briskets are mopped frequently using a garlic, oregano, vinegar, and mildly sweet citrus combination sauce. I can't explain the reason for not spreading on the mustard. It's just not done often here in the mountains, and to be absolutely truthful, most brisket (having been marinated overnight) is cooked within a matter of minutes as high heat is applied from both sides of the cut simultaneously - London broil style... although folks in London have never heard of the stuff! Only more experienced barbecue cooks tend to slowly cook brisket overnight.

Best Wishes,  
Chuckwagon