

PLANET JACKSON HOLE

Bovine Butchery: Butcher Joel Tate on trading in his ski sticks for meat sticks

By *Helen Goelet* on November 29, 2017



Joel Tate brandishes a sanitizing hose, his body covered by a white doctor's coat and high boots. He showers his butchery in suds, sanitizing his theater after a full day of sausage-making.

After ten agonizing months of waiting for USDA approval, Bovine + Swine goods hit the shelves on November 9 at Hole Grocer in Jackson.

Believe it or not, it's pretty darn hard to get a stamp of approval from the USDA, the federal organization that oversees the production of meats distributed across state lines.

Getting their go ahead is like having "best seller" stamped at the top of a book.

"In order to be USDA certified," Tate said, "someone has to be here five days a week to validate my daily process."

What that means is that one must have a full time employee at the office whose job is to check homework every day and give a gold star. The demand for these officials in the valley is low to say the least.

With the addition of Bovine + Swine there are now three USDA certified butchers in Wyoming — the other two are in Cody.

But even after the long wait for that rubber stamp, Tate's spirits are high — he can finally get to work packaging his various sausages and is selling them first locally at the Hole Grocer, Bodega and Binn22. Once the local market is conquered, the hope is to take things nationally.

Tate's current line includes the popular Jalapeno Cheddar, Andouille, Black and Blue, snack sticks and all natural casing all beef hot dogs that people in the valley have indulged in at Bodega for the last couple of years.

Like most Jackson success stories, Tate hasn't always wielded the butcher knife. Back in 2001, a young, avid skier from Washington, Joel Tate bussed tables at the Red Oak Grill in Jackson. As the winter season approached, he realized his income wouldn't support his skiing needs and began to look elsewhere.

Recognizing his work ethic and love for food, the restaurant offered him a free season pass for kitchen labor. He accepted, and with a little taste of the kitchen, Tate fell in love. He never looked back.

The following year, Tate decided to move on to the infamous Rendezvous Bistro. For two weeks, he shucked oysters until he was offered a job. He worked tirelessly, wanting to prove his worth and earning respect until finally being promoted to the grill.

By 2005, the young cook became sous chef of the restaurant, and two years later executive chef. It was in this role where Tate began to experiment with food and discovered charcuterie and sausages.

As he read about various techniques and traditions, his interest grew and with it, his desire to learn.

Tate eventually found his way to a meat science short program at Iowa State University where he learned about the chemistry of meat science — the science behind fermenting and curing, muscle cell structures in various meat — as well as the ins and outs of creating a balanced flavor profile.

"It was a crash course in chemistry, which, having opted out of the subject in high school sort of had my head spinning," Tate said, "but it really got me inspired to learn more about meat science."

Upon his return, Tate was determined to focus his culinary career toward butchery and sausage making.

It's a lot of work for one man to handle on his own, though. Tate looking for a helper, someone passionate about learning how to work with meat and how these systems can be used to their potential.

"I'm still learning every day," Tate said.

But hey, that's the fun part right? **PJH**