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# Italian

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# Made in the U.S.A.

One night, just before his Iowa prosciutto was to be sent to movers and shakers in the gourmet food world for their scrutiny, Herb Eckhouse was working late at the plant. As he sorted through the mounds of paperwork and unfinished tasks, he started wondering what sort of madness he had gotten himself into.

He thought of his beloved hams, hand-salted and curing in their painstakingly climate-controlled lockers. He opened the doors to the rooms where they were hanging, and told them to "be delicious."

Chefs often line the walls of their restaurants with signed photos of celebrities who have dined at their tables. Herb Eckhouse lines the entrance of his prosciutto plant, near Des Moines, with signed menus from celebrity chefs who praise his prosciutto.

"To Herb—the best prosciutto," writes Andrew Carmellini, a James Beard-awarded chef in New York City. "The best prosciutto this side of the Atlantic," pens chef Brooke Vosika on a menu from a Four Seasons Hotel.

Herb's passion for prosciutto began when the former international business executive relocated to Parma, Italy, home of the world-famous ham that's been produced in that region for centuries. When he returned to the United States, he thought making prosciutto would be a perfect fit in his home state of Iowa, right in the middle of hog country. Fast forward 15 years and you find Herb and his wife, Kathy, producing La Quercia prosciutto and pancetta.

Herb didn't want to make an exact replica of Italian prosciutto, but rather, a prosciutto that could proudly stand next to the great hams of Italy, but with its own distinction. One difference, Herb claims, is that his prosciutto is drier than those from Parma, and less moisture means deeper, richer flavor. It took years of hard work and planning, including trips back to Parma to learn the trade, to get his plant up and running. As he sorted through regulations and guidelines, financing headaches, and marketing and promotion needs, Herb didn't lose sight of his No. 1 goal: to make delicious prosciutto and pancetta.

The magic word, delicious, has come back to him over and over. After sending samples out to chefs, restaurants, and specialty food purveyors, the first response to his prosciutto came back. "It's delicious," the note said. Then another arrived: "It's delicious." Again and again, e-mails came flying in with the same response: "It's delicious." The accolades haven't stopped since.

*La Quercia prosciutto is available at Wegman's, Balducci's, and Whole Food stores; Fareway markets in New York City; and at [www.laquercia.us](http://www.laquercia.us).*

