

Dear Snake River Farm Customers

This is the first in what I intend to be a series of letters about grass-fed meat.

Mostly about beef.

Much of what I will write applies to bison.

About 400 addresses receive these emessages.

There are 274 of you on our customer list.

If you do not want to receive messages from me, just reply to that effect and I will remove you.

Last year over 220 of you received beef or bison from us. We harvested 14 bison and 67 beef in 2012.

Two thirds of you have placed your 2013 orders. That is normal for this time of the year.

Based on your orders to date you will want 90 bovines total. That is probably as many as we can graze.

From talking to other farmers and based on research I have done, an 80% reorder rate is very good.

Our reorder rate over 90 %.

We are proud of that.

I am writing this series because some of you are not getting what you expected or wanted from our grass-fed meat.

So far this year I have received negative feedback, some direct, some indirect from eight of you.

Two families believe all their meat is too tough to eat.

Two have trouble with some cuts but not others.

Two have specific issues with some cuts.

One family reports that their meat is gamey tasting.

One family reports bone chips in ground bison.

At the same time, I know from your feedback that at least 80% of you are quite happy with the taste and tenderness of your meat.

From experience as a Quality Manager, (I was one for a while.) I know that if I learn of eight complaints there are probably three times that many out there.

Which is to say, I suspect about 10% of you are not getting what you wanted from us and our meat.

From an industry standpoint that is low and might be considered fine.

It is not fine with me.

It pains me to think that any of you are unhappy with our meat.

You paid a lot for it, and of course you had high expectations.

I have done extensive research recently on this topic.

It turns out that no matter what; some people are not going to be happy with grass-fed meat.

For some people, getting a lot of meat all at once is too great an inconvenience.

For others, cooking unfamiliar cuts is a problem rather than an opportunity.

For some, the techniques and subtleties of cooking the various cuts are just too difficult to master or too inconvenient.

Some people never get comfortable with the texture of meat from animals that use their muscles.

One cook told me that her husband would only eat meat well done.

Others have said that their families like lots of fat on their beef.

I have read that some people like the taste of corn fed beef.

And some I am told, never get over the fact that grass-fed meat tastes different from grain-fed meat.

The above are all choices that people have a perfect right to make.

I just want to be sure that I have supplied you with all the helpful information I can.

Of course it is entirely possible that the complaints I listed above are correct.

It is possible that I sold an animal that was tough or gamey. Unless we taste it ourselves we cannot know for certain.

Whenever we hear of a complaint one of the first things I do is check with other customers. If for example, a customer is displeased with their meat but the customers who got the other quarters of the same animal are happy, that tells me something. If it is logical to do so, I try to buy some of the meat back in order to sample it ourselves. So far we have not found the meat to be unusual or tough. One the other hand, I know that things can go wrong and no doubt there are variations in the meat we sell.

I have written several letters to you since January with recipes and cooking tips. Each time I do so I get a small flood of responses assuring me that your meat is delicious and that you enjoy it. Thank you. That is just plain sweet of you. One recent letter rang a bell for me. It made me realize I have been taking too much for granted.

Rachael, a young mother and a long time customer wrote, "p.s. We have always had excellent results cooking the pork and beef. I have learned that cooking grass feed beef is like cooking venison; lower the temp and cook it rare."

Now I am not suggesting that our meat should taste anything like venison. However, those of us with have a history of eating wild meat or meat direct from a farm are naturally more accepting of grass-fed meat.

My guess is that over 50% of you fall into the above category. Again, I am not implying that your grass-fed meat should be gamey or tough, what I am saying is many of you are familiar with and tolerant of variations and characteristics that come with grass-fed meat. You know what to expect.

For some of you, the situation is the opposite. Your family has purchased only industrial store meat for generations.

There are advantages to buying meat from a conventional store.
The cuts are always the same.
The meat is always available.
You buy only the meats you want.
The taste is always the same.

I believe the above to be true but I do not know it firsthand. I have never purchased a steak or roast from a store. I have never purchased a chicken in a store. For some of you the exact opposite is true. You had never purchased meat from a farmer or eaten meat from a hog that spends its days digging in the ground. We have a chasm to communicate across. So, I will work on that.

In future letters I will cover, more or less and not in any particular order,

1. The basics of meat.
2. The taste of grass-fed meat.
3. Possible causes of "off" or gamey taste in meat.
4. The texture of grass-fed meat.

5. What can cause tough meat.
6. Some relevant details about butchering cuts of meat.
7. Aging meat.
8. More detail information on cooking different cuts.
9. How much fat is optimal in ground grass fed meat?
10. Breeds of beef and the practical differences.
11. How conventional beef is raised and how grass-fed differs.
12. Measures we take to give our animals a low stress life and a stress free death.
13. How I select animals to raise.
14. How I select animals for harvest.
15. I will probably digress into hogs also.
16. Anything else you bring up through your responses.

I do not know how many letters or words it will take to cover the above. I have not written anything yet.

I hope this will be helpful to some of you.

Best regards.

Tom

p.s. I wrote a short article for the Minnesota Bison Association journal recently that is in part about the taste meat.

I had not intended to send it to you but given the present topic you may find it interesting.

I will send it to you.