

Dear Customers

Spring Farm Day is Saturday, May 18. Specific messages on that will come to you soon.

This is the last message I intend to send this spring about cooking in general. We will send letters about cooking specific parts of the animals, broth, ox tail etc. between now and fall harvest time.

I have pasted a section titled “**Grass Fed Beef Cooking Tips by the Cut**” at the end of this letter.

This letter and that document will both be posted at Sarah’s blog site, www.sandhillfarmsarah.wordpress.com

Short Update on things at the farm.

I am doing some barn and shed building this spring. A little challenging working between snow storms but I am making good progress. Alex posted a photo of the main barn roof on April 9. I extended the roof, hitching rail and wood shed. The red oak which I had built into the barn succumbed to oak wilt.

We posted photos of the first bison calf yesterday. A second was born today. They are early. In fact I was at a bison conference this past weekend and no herd except the Custer Park herd had calves.

Early calving is generally a good sign. I assume it means the animals had a good summer.

In any case I do not control, nor am I directly responsible for the sex lives of these bison.

The posting also included a short series on maple syruping. That work is going well despite confounding weather.

To see those photos and more, Goggle “Snake River Farm Minnesota” and click to the facebook page.

Feedback and Questions from you.

My letters have prompted feedback from many of you. Thank you for that. Feedback is helpful.

A comment I wrote about locking in **feed prices brought a question from Jim.**

To clarify, our grass-fed animals, beef, bison and lambs are grass-fed only.

The pastured hogs do get supplemental grain. Mostly oats and corn. Hogs are not ruminants. They cannot prosper on grass or forage only. Their stomachs are much like ours. They are omnivores.

I grind and prepare the hog feed myself so that I know exactly what they eat. I feed them a diet very high in oats. Of course they have green material all summer.

This year we will be feeding one pasture of hogs wheat and oats only, no corn. If that works well and I expect it will, we will switch away from corn completely.

I will send a detailed letter about that to you within the next month or two.

Shannon asked why thawing meat in a microwave is bad. It is bad for meat. Microwave ovens are totally different from all other methods of cooking or heating. The microwave machine does not generate heat directly. It generates electromagnetic waves similar to radio waves. Those waves are of a frequency that strongly affects water molecules. It is most efficient at heating water such as drinks and soups. Materials that do not contain water molecules, like most dishes are not heated. Of course, like everything else in life, the effect is not quite that simple. Other molecules are affected to a lesser extent such as fat and grease. While some materials such as metals are strongly affected.

For now just consider food materials.

The microwaves do not penetrate deeply and evenly. That is not an issue with a fluid cup of water or coffee but it is a problem with thicker materials like a bowl of soup, a slice of cheese or a piece of meat.

A bowl of soup may boil on the outer edges but be cold in the center.

A slice of cheese will melt, boil and burn on the edges but be cool in the center.

The same is true in meat. Some areas will be overcooked and deeper areas may still be frozen. The effects on a particular cut of meat are unpredictable and not good.

Do not do it.

Cover the meat and place it in the refrigerator for a day or more before cooking.

Joe wrote the following in response to my comments concerning the effects of diet on meat.

“Interesting, your observations about the taste of meat being influenced by what the animals eat. When I was a teenager my family bought raw milk from a local farmer. Often the milk would have a slightly different taste based on which pasture the cows were in. We accepted this as normal. Several times that I remember the cows ate some weed in the spring that made the milk bitter and nearly undrinkable. This too was considered normal. It comes as no surprise to me that the taste of meat is affected by the animal's diet.”

The plant may have been wormwood. It is a European sage that was imported to the US. It is woody when mature but palatable to cattle when the plant is young. Wormwood is known for its antihelmintic (deworming) properties. Knowledgeable cattle herds will self medicate by grazing on such plants. I intend to write on that in a later letter.

Laureen wrote the following in response to my letter **about the taste of grass-fed** meat.

“Extremely interesting, Tom. We like the taste of the bison so much that I have to share this tidbit with you. A few years or so ago while grocery shopping we decided to pick up a couple of steaks for dinner. We were about to take delivery of our bison but were in between. So we picked up two T-bones. They were lighter colored, not the rich red bison we are used to, but the package said ‘delicious’ or something like that. We paid a good price – around \$16 for the two steaks and grilled them. Awful. Simply awful – no flavor at all. I don’t think we could go

back to store bought beef. It really has no flavor as you say in this article. There was probably nothing wrong with the steaks but our tastes have been refined to your grass-fed bison. Thanks again for sharing these interesting articles. They are reading so true to our experiences.

P.S. We grilled Porterhouse steaks on Sunday. Don said it was the best steak he ever ate. The best steak that I ever ate was the sirloin we had a few weeks earlier. We just keep on enjoying the best steaks and meat we have ever had in our lives!"

Jess, who has been buying meat from us for several years wrote, "I would say our first year was a major adjustment. I made a lot of mistakes. But we are committed to the concept of knowing where our food came from and kept at it. ... of course we had a freezer full to work through which helped! We learned to like the flavor and like it more now that we can cook it better."

Well, enough of that. I pasted the letters from Laureen and Jess to encourage those of you who may be having trouble cooking or getting used to the real meat taste. The tips below were sent to you about six weeks ago. I have rewritten them. Sarah will have the following version on her blog site.

I did not quote them but I received several letters in recent weeks from people who have had excellent cooking results using a crock pot. That after several failed attempts at grilling. Consider a crock pot if things are turning out tough. Master grilling later.

Grass Fed Beef Cooking Tips by the Cut

1. Thaw completely. This is best done in the refrigerator. Covered. Do not thaw using a microwave.
2. Bring beef to an even temperature throughout prior to cooking. Room temperature is best but keep the meat covered.
3. Always pre-heat your oven, pan or grill before cooking grass-fed beef.
4. 30% less cooking time is typical because of our higher protein levels and lower fat content.
5. If using an oven, lower the oven temperature by 50°F when using your recipes.
6. Grass-fed steaks are most succulent when eaten rare to medium-rare.
7. Use an instant-read thermometer.
8. Grass-fed meat continues to cook even after it has been removed from the heat.
9. Finished temperatures of 125° F – Rare (Best); 130° F – Medium Rare (OK); 135° F – Medium.
10. Keep it tender and juicy. Lightly coat the cuts with extra virgin olive oil then season.
11. Cook it "low and slow." Cook over lower heat retains moisture.
12. Let it rest for 6-10 minutes allows the precious juices to be redistributed within the relaxing meat.

NOTE: The meat should always be juicy with a pink center when served. The red liquid that should still be present inside the steak or roast (and on the serving plate) is not blood. It is myoglobin in water a protein constituent of healthy red meat.

Choose the right method for the appropriate cut

Use the right cooking method for the cut of meat that you are cooking. It can be so disappointing to anticipate a wonderful grass fed beef meal and then have the meat turn out to be tough and chewy.

The different cuts lend themselves to different forms of cooking. The cooking method makes a huge difference in how your meals turn out.

Grilling a Steak

The fat in grass fed beef has a much different consistency than the fat in commercial, grain fed beef. It melts at a lower temperature.

Until you gain experience, you will be surprised that the steaks are done before you expect.

1. Grill grass fed beef at lower heat.
2. Grilled more slowly and carefully than you would steaks from grain fed beef.
3. If you like to quick – sear the outside of the steaks to seal in the juices, you can still do this, but just do not sear at too high a temperature.
4. Low and slow. Do not grill any higher than slightly past medium.

Watch the steaks closely; you do not want to overcook them. However, when done, the slow cooked steaks also have the grill marks, for great presentation, they just are not seared.

Grilling Cuts

Not all steaks are suited to go straight onto the grill. Most cuts of steak are better marinated. Some require marinate or tenderizing.

The tenderest steaks for grilling include:

1. Filet Mignon
2. T-Bone
3. New York Strip
4. Rib Eye or Rib Steak
5. Sirloin

Steaks that definitely should be marinated before grilling:

1. Round Steak
2. Cube Steak
3. Chuck Steak
4. Sirloin Tip Steak
5. Sirloin Steaks

Braising or better yet crock pot

This is the best way to cook the tougher cuts

Braising is simply cooking on low heat with added liquid for at least 4 – 6 hours, in a covered container. Sometimes referred to it as slow cooked. It is the most convenient way to cook. If you cook low and slow enough, you can make any cut fall-off-the-bone,

fork-tender. Braising (crock potting) works with everything from roasts, to ribs, to organ meats. You may want to brown the outside first by placing it on the grill or on a pan for a few minutes on each side.

The other benefit of braising is you end up with a fabulous Au Jus, or stock that can be made into gravy, served as Au Jus, or saved as stock for later. You can also get Au Jus from dry roasting, but you get less of it, and it is much more concentrated, whereas the Au Jus from braising tastes wonderful and goes a long way.

Any time you cook in a **crock pot**, you are basically braising. We all know how easy it is to throw something in the crock pot in the morning and come home to a hearty, wholesome meal, whether it is a plain roast or stew.

The best cuts for braising include

1. Chuck Roast
2. Shoulder Roast
3. Rump Roast
4. Brisket
5. Short Ribs
6. Tongue
7. Heart

Cooking ground beef

Since ground beef (hamburger) is already ground up, tenderness is not an issue. You should cook hamburgers, or ground beef dishes at a little lower temperature and for a shorter time than you would with grain fed beef. Overcooked hamburger will dry out and lose flavor. Quality Meats prepares our grass-fed ground meat in a 90/10, 93/7 range. That is quite lean. Do not overcook.

Pan frying

Good for tough steaks but suitable for even the best steaks. If you do not have a grill, take heart, you can still enjoy premium steaks, and sometimes they are better pan-fried, than grilled.

Pan fry in olive oil, it helps keep the steak moist and seems to improve tenderness.

Tenderize round steak/cube steak with a tenderizing hammer, then lightly flour, dip it in egg, and fry in olive oil, grape seed oil, or almond oil.

Pan frying is the only way to cook liver with plenty of onions and bacon in the frying pan can go a long way towards disguising the liver.

Dry Roasting (This may be tricky. Do not do it unless you are experienced and good.)

Dry roasting involves cooking at a higher temperature, with little or no liquid. With grass fed beef, you will want to cook at a lower temperature. Cover the roaster to keep the meat moist. If the meat dries out, you will be unhappy. The best cuts for dry roasting are the more tender cuts of roasts such as:

1. Whole Tenderloin
2. Standing Rib Roast
3. Sirloin Tip Roast
4. Rump Roast

5. Round Roast

These roasts may have enough marbling and or moisture to withstand the higher heat and no additional liquid. But this is risky.

Best regards. Tom