

SNAKE RIVER FARM

January 2012 Newsletter and Order Solicitation

BISON, CATTLE and damn fine HORSES

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Dear Friends and Customers

In this letter, I will update you on plans for 2012 and ask you to **place your 2012 orders now**.

Last year we were sold out by March 2nd. I was able to add more animals and I think all of you got what you needed. I will do the same this year, if you do me the favor of ordering early.

The demand for grass-fed and humanely raised meat is incredible. Eventually that demand will force us to limit orders or at least to stop taking new customers. If you are getting this message in January, you are on our customer list and I will do all I can so that your 2012 order gets fulfilled. More on that below.

Unfortunately our prices are up. That is unavoidable. The costs of young animals and feed have doubled and tripled from just a couple years. More on that below.

Prices and Ordering.

I know many of you are anxious to order so the 2012 prices are as follows, per hanging weight.

Bison \$5.00. Beef \$2.75. Pork \$2.00

Please order beef and bison in increments of ¼ and hogs by the ½.

No deposit is required, just your honest best estimate of what you want. You can change or cancel your order at any time before harvest. Sooner is better for me. It gives me time to make schedule changes. You can cancel or change for any reason. The most common reason in the past two years has been job loss or financial set-back. A couple of good customers moved out of Minnesota to find work. I understand that.

Harvest Timing and Relative Portion Size.

As usual, bison and beef will be harvested from late September until early December; hogs will be harvested in the second half of November.

If you have a preference for early or late in that time frame let me know. If you prefer a relatively larger or smaller animal, I can probably accommodate that also.

Late Orders, Waiting List and New Customers.

In the past we have filled virtually all late or wait listed orders. It is very hard to turn someone away who wants better food for their family and who has been recommended by one of you. That by the way is how we get most of our new customers. By your recommendation. That is nice.

We are listed on a few websites but we do not otherwise advertize. There has never been a need to advertize as we sell all we grow, every year. The problem we are running into is that eventually we will have to turn people away. I do not know how we will manage that.

I love caring for this land and these animals but I am just one old farmer. I only can and want to do so much.

Fortunately, my daughter Sarah, her husband Jordan and son Saul, built their home on 80 acres nearby. Jordan is fencing their land. They will graze some of your beef animals there. Last year they pastured 10 beef for you.

Ryan and Ashley Straw and their two sons, Hunter and Colton have fenced their land to graze beef animals also. In addition, Ryan will care for a small herd of hogs this coming summer. Last year he pastured 7 beef for you.

Those two young families will help us to meet this year's customer growth.

I am delighted at watching Saul, Hunter and Colton, (5, 4 and 2 years) grow as farm boys.

More on Prices.

I am concerned that our costs do not get too high for you. At the same time we cannot stay in business if we do not make a profit. I have set 2012 prices and will honor them but there is a risk for us in setting prices early.

Last year I set our beef price at \$2.25 not anticipating that the cost of yearlings would go up \$300 per head as it did.

That increase essentially put us at break even last year for beef.

Corn prices have gone to record highs because of ethanol. (Do not get me started on that topic.) The price of corn, pushes up the cost of all feeds including the winter hay we must buy. Last year, I pre-bought all the hog feed I would need at a good time. That helped us produce hogs at a reasonable cost. I will do the same this year. Bison as you know are also at crazy high prices. All of you who purchased bison from us last year got it at below market prices. Our 2012 bison price of \$5 per pound is terribly high in my opinion but still below the cost of replacements. That means, I can hold that price if you don't order too many. I can make a profit selling the bison that are born here at that price but I cannot buy extras without losing money.

Farm Visits

If I have you on email, you should have received a message last week about lard rendering days. Those days are **January 28th and February 25th**.

I am working toward a soap making event (from beef tallow), but I haven't got that perfected yet. Maybe yet this winter.

Also, maple syrup making in early spring if the weather cooperates. Right now the trees cannot tell if it is January, October or March.

Our Spring Customer Day is **Saturday May 19** from noon until sundown. Bring your family and friends.

The Fall Customer Day is **Saturday September 22**, from noon to sundown.

We will have horses hitched for wagon and cart rides. You, your family and friends are invited. All events are informal and relaxed. No selling. Just a nice day in the country. You do not need to be a customer to attend.

All events are "rain or shine". We do not change our plans because of the weather, just our clothes.

Of course, you are welcome to bring your families and friends to see the animals and visit the farm anytime we are home.

If I have your email address I will send notices to you for those events as they come up. We have also set up a Face Book page "Snake River Farm Minnesota". There are photos there but I need to learn how to do more.

2011 Harvest Plans and Your Order.

Will begin harvesting beef and bison in late September. Most will be harvested in October and the remainder in early December. Hogs are all harvested in late November.

All of our animals are processed at Quality Meats in Foley. They work hard to do a great job for us and you.

There is normally a seven to ten day period between harvesting and the time your meat is ready for pick-up.

That will be longer of course, if you have Quality process your meat into smoked hams or sausages etc.

Beef

The beef we will harvest are all meat type heifers selected by me to grow and finish well on grass.

Bison

The bison harvested in fall 2011 will be both heifers and bulls. They will be about 30 months old at harvest.

The following applies to both Beef and Bison.

All quarters are similar. The butcher shop mixes fronts and backs to give everyone a variety of cuts.

You tell Quality Meats how to cut and package your meat.

You should pay us for the hanging weight before you pick up your meat.

You pay Quality Meats for the processing when you pick up your meat. About 60 cents per pound.

The folks at the butcher shop are very easy to get along with. Ask for Beth or Nancy.

If you are a new customer I tell them so and they will be particularly helpful.

Hogs.

The hogs are raised in pastures where they can eat green plants, roots and worms. In addition I grind and mix a unique blend of grains and other natural ingredients for them to eat. All local ingredients.

Because they are outside and get a lot of exercise, the hogs grow strong and stay lean.

Because they get a varied and natural diet their meat is exceptionally tasty and high in good nutrients.

If you are not on our email list, please send me your email address if you have one. That way I can keep you informed of special events and offers. I will not abuse it and I do not share your information with others.

Email works best for me. snakeriverfarmer@gmail.com **NOTE THAT MY EMAIL HAS CHANGED.**

Or, if you prefer, call us at 763 263 2721 and leave a message. We are not in the house much.

Best regards and thank you. Tom Barthel