

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Customers of the Snake River Farm

This is not the letter on "taste" that I promised. I hope to start working on that tonight.

1. This is just a general update.
2. Tell you about a price increase for pork effective May
3. I will comment on customer feedback

(I realize I am not punctuating correctly but you get my meaning.)

The Update.

Spring is slow in coming. We still have a foot of hard snow.

The sun is high and warm however. I worked outside most of today in a sleeveless vest. (Is that redundant?) (Are all vests sleeveless?)

I like this weather for working. I have to take off my coat because I get too warm. I cannot slow down or I get a chill.

I tapped some maple trees last week. The little sap that ran Saturday has been frozen in the buckets since.

My brother Mike, who lives in Watertown, got lots of sap a week ago but the weather is surprisingly different just 30 to 50 miles south.

I ordered chickens, turkeys, and duckling for the week before Spring Farm Day, which is May 18th.

Last week Gail went to Rapid City with me while I attended a three day holistic grazing seminar. This was the fourth one with this group. About 15 of us.

We compare notes every year or two.

I came home with a ton of ideas to implement this season.

Price increase for pork from \$2.10 to \$2.25 per hanging weight pound effective May

Sorry about that.

Feed prices are almost 20% higher than this time in 2012. They have not softened as I hoped.

I am buying feed now to lock in prices. I do so each year.

I would be happy to put that off if one of you has a crystal ball that can tell if prices will stay steady or drop.

Otherwise, I cannot take the chance. A drought scare could send prices much higher.

Off course, if you have ordered already, and most of you have, your prices are not changing.

I do not see a change in bison prices coming.

Beef prices are not likely to change. I will not know that for certain until I buy a majority of this year's beef calves.

I will buy calves soon but I do not want them too far ahead of the grass.

Right now, the grass is under twelve inches of icy snow.

If you are wondering why I do not buy them ahead, the answer is, it is difficult to get farmers to part with their animals early.

Farmers are always betting on higher prices to come.

I could contract buy calves ahead but they would be at a premium price.

Customer feedback.

I mentioned in a letter that I buy only heifers because they finish younger and smaller.

Younger matters because I want them to finish in the fall of their second year. They are then around 20 months of age.

Smaller matters because more of you want smaller $\frac{1}{4}$ s. Those of you who want larger buy more than $\frac{1}{4}$. Leigh commented "I had wondered why you didn't raise steers and now I know. The first cow I bought for meat was a steer and was quite good."

It is universally accepted, and true I believe, that the meat from a beef steer and from a beef heifer is indistinguishable.

Beef bull, however is different. It is tastier, some might say gamey, and is less tender. Testosterone is a powerful hormone.

I do not consider bull meat bad. But some of you are likely to.

As long as we are on the topic, there is no such thing as a bison steer.

There could be, anatomically, but castrating bison does not have the same positive effect as it does on some other species.

Now that I think about it, that is a good thing. Life is exciting enough around here without having to castrate buffalo bulls.

Buffalo bulls do grow faster, bigger, and different from buffalo heifers.

I harvest them at about the same age, but the bulls are significantly larger.

Heifers closer to 100 pounds per quarter. Bulls closer to 150.

There is no discernible taste difference between bison bulls and heifers at the age of 30 months, when we harvest them.

In case you are wondering, bison grow and mature later than cattle. Thirty months is typical for grass fed harvesting.

Our hogs are a roughly 50-50 mix of females (gilts) and castrated males (barrows).

They grow very similarly and there is no difference in the meat.

A boar pig (intact male) does taste toward gamey.

You would not like that.

Sheep sold as lambs are always females or castrated males, (a wether) and under one year old.

Meat from sheep older than a year is mutton.

Mutton tastes much different from lamb. Some people actually prefer mutton but most do not like the taste.

Back to customer feedback.

My sister-in law Candy wrote, "I always liked the taste of our Jersey cow culls and think nothing has quite come close to that."

Those mature dairy cows do have more taste. The French would prefer it. Some of you would not.

More on that in the "Taste" letter which I have yet to write.

Al wrote a lengthy letter with many good questions. I will try to cover most of those questions in future letters.

He asked, "How can Ox Tail soup possibly have any meat in it or even taste better than a beef bouillon cube in a gallon of warm water? What are those cubes anyway?"

That is a very good question, in two directions.

1. The Ox tail broth does not contain meat but it does contain many natural, tasty, and healthful components. I will try to cover that later in the year.
2. What I want to get to is the bouillon cube.

“Beef Bouillon Flavor: Salt, yeast, caramel food color (E150), spices, flavor enhancers, oil, anticaking agents, edible acids, flavorings, antioxidants, Beef Bouillon Aroma: Oil.”

The above list is not so much ingredients as classes of ingredients.

What does “edibles acids” mean? How about “flavorings”?

“Flavor enhancer” means MSG, aka Monosodium Glutamate.

“anticaking agents”? Sounds like food spies or maybe that stuff in Crisco that causes it to keep forever.

Gail is opposed to anything so unnatural that it does not grow mold and spoil in a normal way. I guess her thinking is if it acts like plastic, maybe it is.

I am not opposed to bouillon cubes but they are not simple and I do not think they are food.

I will work on the Taste letter tomorrow night.

Tomorrow day will be sunny and grand.

Best possible regards.

Tom

p.s. Sarah is posting these messages on her blog page www.sandhillfarmsarah.wordpress.com

You can delete them now and find them there later.

