

I like bison best.

November was nice in central Minnesota. It had lots of good days to finish the harvest and to prepare for winter. The association's annual banquet and auction were fun as usual. Special thanks to all the folks who work to make the banquet and sale run so smooth each year. We bought five very nice heifers from Dale and Beth Rengstorf's consignment.

If you don't normally attend this event, put it on your 2010 calendar right now. The banquet is Friday, and the sale is Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend.

We are buyers every year at the auction because we need to add animals to our herd. We sell more bison meat than we can produce. Our herd runs between 30 and 50 bison.

You may recall that we sell bison, beef and hogs by the $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$. The recession does not seem to have affected our customers. Not sure why. Maybe the people who can afford to buy grass-fed meat are financially better off than most, or maybe our customers have determined that eating right is a high priority. At any rate, our part of agribusiness is good.

As I wrote above, we try to keep the bison herd between 30 and 50. We sell close to 20 beef animals by the quarter also, but we hold the beef herd down to just a few animals through the winter. We buy all our winter hay, so it makes sense for us to reduce the beef herd and buy yearlings in the spring. We can easily sell all the bison and beef our pastures can handle.

We have been raising more hogs each year and this year we raised

and sold about 20. We have found that pasture raised hogs can get close to 400 pounds live weight and still be relatively lean. Those 20 averaged over 350 pounds when we harvested them around Thanksgiving. They had all been sold since September.

I like hogs, but they are not nearly as likeable at 400 pounds as they are at 10. Pastured doesn't really mean the same thing for hogs as it does for bison. They need grain. I feed them a high roughage grain mix which I suppose is about as satisfying for them as a salad only diet would be to me. In any case when they get this big you just can't feed them enough.

Every day there is some reason to go into the pasture with them to move a trough or straighten the fence. We handle all our animals gently so the hogs are calm and good-natured but there is something a bit unnerving about walking in a herd of 400-pound animals that are always searching for tasty things to eat.

I don't mind that the hogs are gone until spring.

I suppose the fact that by December we are down to 35 bison, six beef animals and zero hogs tells you what we like the best.

Hope for good bobsledding snow. It will give my horses something to do.

See you at the Spring Conference in Rochester.

Connie and Jim Stannard are working to assure a grand meeting.

Tom

December 3, 2009, Bison News Article, by Tom Barthel WC 484

