

Dear Customers

I have received dozens of thoughtful responses from you in recent days. Many of you wrote just to tell you enjoy your meat. That is great. Thank you. Some of you wrote to also tell me that the first year was challenging for you. For some it was challenging because of taste. A taste you now prefer. For some because cooking pastured meat was different and initially challenging. Frankly, in hindsight, I am surprised that such a high percentage of you have persevered. I am certainly glad you did. A many-year bison customer wrote today. She wrote to tell me that her bison meat tastes different each year. She enjoys that. Of course it tastes different. Each growing season is different. Each animal is different. Different because it has choices. Choices in what it eats and how it lives. I will write about that in a future letter. I regret that I did not realize sooner how these many differences would affect you. Thank you for being so good about learning and experiencing these differences.

We got more snow today. So did you, I suppose. Spring is not yet late but I think we are ready for it. Sarah expressed it best. She said, "This snow storm is pretty, but it was a lot prettier in December."

Basic Meat Science

Not really science and highly simplified. I want to convey some basic facts and information about meat. Technically meat comes from the skeletal muscles of mammals and birds. Lean muscle tissue is very high in protein, vitamins, and minerals. Like all organic materials including trees, grass, and us, meat is mostly water. Over 70 percent water. After water, the breakdown is roughly 20% protein, 5% fat, 1% carbohydrates and 1% vitamins and minerals. Meat is unique in that it contains all the amino acids (proteins) that humans require. Meat is frequently classified as red meat or white meat. Beef, bison, pork, and lamb are all considered red meat. Poultry and fish white meat. Myoglobin, a protein, holds oxygen in muscle cells. In general, the more active and healthy an animal, the more myoglobin its muscles hold. Myoglobin, not blood, gives red meat its characteristic color. The red fluid that comes from meat when thawed and cooked is myoglobin. Myoglobin is a useful protein. It is not blood. Blood can be nutritious but it complicates cooking. Your meat contains virtually no blood. I will explain that in a future letter. Grass-fed animals will have more of this red fluid than confined animals. That is because pastured animals use and develop their muscles. The red fluid is a good thing. It is the source of au jus, the natural juice of meat. It is flavorful and healthy. When cooked and served at the ideal temperature your steaks and other cuts should be in a small pool of red juice, au jus. The skeletal muscles work with bones to produce movement. Muscles are bundled in thin sheaths of connective tissue and connected to bones by tendons. Ligaments hold bones together at joints. Cartilage is generally a layer of tissue that cushions bones at joints.

All four of these materials, and bones, consist mostly of collagen cells. Many collagen materials, when cooked slowly, convert to gelatin.

Gelatin is the basis of soups, thickeners, and broths. When properly prepared, these tissues or their products are flavorful and healthy.

It is not all quite that simple, but close.

Some skeletal muscles contain much more connective tissues than others.

For example, the tenderest muscle in the body is the tenderloin. The tenderloin is a single bundle of muscles that contracts in one simple movement and is not heavily used. It is the source of filet mignon.

Technically the tenderloin is the psoas major muscle ventral to the transverse processes of the lumbar vertebrae.

You do not really want me to be that technical, do you?

I will try to avoid it.

The front shoulder of a beef animal provides complex movement. The shoulder (aka the chuck) provides connections between a host of bones and is heavily used. Cuts of meat from this area will be very flavorful when cooked correctly but will need slow, moist, and careful preparation. Think chuck pot roast, shoulder roast, chuck steak, flat iron steak, shoulder steak, chuck 7 bone roast, etc.

Of course, you can take the easy road and have the chuck processed into delicious ground meat or stew meat.

There are other muscles and other edible parts of the beef animal in addition to skeletal muscle.

The heart and tongue are both actually muscles. Highly developed and specialized muscles but muscle nevertheless.

Both are flavorful and healthy when prepared correctly.

Bone marrow and soup bones like tail bones are also edible, tasty, and nutritious.

In addition to all the above, there is offal. Offal is loosely defined but generally includes everything else. It includes the liver, kidney, other internal organs, stomach, and intestines.

The word offal is of Germanic origin and literally meant "off fall." The stuff that falls out of the abdominal cavity when an animal is butchered.

Do not be totally turned off by this. Numerous cultures get their favorite dishes from offal. Haggis (Scottish sheep intestine), foie gras pate (French, poultry liver), sweetbreads (thymus and pancreas), chitterlings (southern US, small intestine), chopped liver (Jewish). You get the idea.

My primary goal in writing this and future letters is to help you understand order, prepare, and enjoy your meat more fully.

A secondary goal is to encourage you to a more complete utilization of these animals.

More to follow in future letters.

I will try to keep letters in this series to between 500 and 1000 words.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Best regards.

Tom