

Mossback Farm News

March 2008

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Greetings from the farm!

It's early March, and it feels like spring has sprung here on Mossback Farm. The red-wing blackbirds are singing, the bluebirds are flitting about, the pheasants are making sporadic appearances, and the grass is growing. After the snowiest January that we can recall, it's nice to feel the sun on our faces and start planting our garden!

The biggest event for the Mossback Farmers over the past year definitely was the birth of our son, Dalton. He was born on May 22 in McMinnville, and is a delightful, good-tempered, fun baby. We are enjoying getting to know him and seeing him grow and develop new skills every day. And I know Rich is looking forward to having a farm helper in a few years.

As you can imagine, we've been pretty busy getting used to the whole being-a-parent thing. But we have had time to harvest our first couple of rounds of steers, and procure new steers from our neighbor. We're very lucky that our neighbor across the way raises Red Angus cattle naturally on pastures, so we've been able to buy calves from him. It saves a lot of anxiety on the part of the animals to only have to travel a short distance to get to our farm.

In other news, this winter we've been continuing with our conservation work, both planting and fencing. Rich put in several hundred Valley Ponderosa Pines, the last of that phase of the project. And he's made a lot of progress on fencing our main pasture, and plans to complete that work this spring. Of course, we have several other areas to fence, so there's no chance he'll run out of work anytime soon!

We had a good honey harvest this year, but sadly both our hives died. We're not entirely sure what happened, but are hoping to procure more this year and try again. It's definitely a learning experience.



Mossback Farm Update – 2008 Plans

This year we're continuing our conservation work (fencing and tree planting). We're also going to be working on our vegetable garden, doing a lot of canning and making of fruit preserves, and completing other random projects around the farm.

We're continuing to focus on beef as our main farm product and we'll have beef available by the quarter, half or whole steer in July and October. Our 2008 beef is selling fast, so if you are interested, please continue to read on to learn about pricing and ordering.



Beef available this summer and fall!

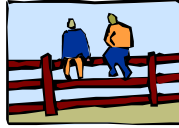
We are now taking orders for beef. Our cattle have been raised strictly on a grass/hay only diet (pasture during the warm months and hay in the winter). The meat is quite lean, and the flavor and consistency of the meat is excellent! (See more about this on page 2.)

We are charging \$3.75/lb(hanging weight), plus processing for the beef. The end cost will be about \$5.75 per pound. Each quarter will probably providing about 75-100lbs of meat.

Order have been coming in quickly so our supply is limited. If you are interested, placing an order is very simple - just [contact us](#) to confirm quantities still available, and send in your deposit to hold your order (deposit per quarter is \$150). The beef will be butchered by Frontier Custom Cutting in early July or late October, and will be ready for pick-up in Carlton in mid-July or early November.

Farm Musings: Raising animals: “why beef?” and “why pasture?”

by Val Blaha



A lot of people ask us why we are no longer raising and selling meat chickens and eggs. We usually reply that it just wasn't pencilling out financially, especially due to rising feed and transportation costs. But our reasons actually go much deeper than that, and are linked with our general farming philosophy.

Unless you have a very large farm with enough acreage, water, machinery, etc. to grow your own chicken feed, the majority of what chickens eat must be brought in from off the farm. That means that a lot of fossil fuels must be expended getting that feed to the farm. And if you are committed to raising chickens on organic, non-gmo grains, the cost of that chicken feed is not inexpensive. The more we considered our chicken-raising future, the more we realized that it wasn't just the high cost/low profit that didn't settle with us - it was the fact that we were participants in a fossil-fuel dependent and large-scale international commodity system - something we were opposed to when we first started farming.

So, why beef? Well, as you may know if you've read [Michael Pollan's books](#), bovines are naturally best suited to eating grass. And here at Mossback Farm, we got grass! And when we don't have enough grass, such as during the winter, our friends Barbara and Tom in McMinnville have a farm specializing in high-quality, low input hay. So the food that our steers eat travels 0 miles for most of the year, and a total of about 25 miles during the winter, and that's it. Now, obviously some fossil fuels go into planting, harvesting, and transporting the hay, but that is minimal compared to what goes into planting, growing, harvesting, mixing, storing, and shipping chicken feed.

Another reason why we're doing beef is that it fits with our animal raising ethics and our pasture-based farming philosophy. We've always raised our animals so that they could spend their lives doing what they would like to be doing, in an environment conducive to health. So our chickens lived on our pastures and were free to scratch for bugs, dirt, plants, etc. Our pigs could root and wallow, and our sheep could do their sheepish things. (Mostly grazing and getting into trouble, in the case of our naughty lambs!) And our steers now can graze to their hearts' content. We use our land management skills so that the animals live outdoors, on healthy growing grass, with little or no mud. And that is not only good for the animals, but for the long-term health of our land and the other critters that live here.

Grass-fed beef: mmm, tasty!



Often we're asked about the flavor and texture of grass-fed beef. Now we're obviously biased, but we think our beef is wonderful. But not all grassfed beef is created equal. There can be great differences between breeds, between what types of grasses they eat and how they are finished.

We realize that committing to several hundred dollars of meat at once is a big decision, and unfortunately, there are a lot of people selling grassfed meat who don't follow through on the requirements to produce a tender, tasty product. This has led to a belief that grassfed beef is tough and tastes bad....nothing could be further from the truth! As long as cattle are raised in a stress-free environment, rotated through pastures regularly, with all of the green growing grass that they can eat, they produce a meat that is tender, tasty, and [good for you](#).

Now, we're happy to vouch for the taste and texture of our meat... we think both are excellent. But more importantly, judging from past comments, our customers wholeheartedly agree. Certainly preparation of the meat can make a big difference. Since the meat is very lean, it means that you may need to use more oil than you're used to when you are cooking up the meat, either steaks or ground beef. (We recommend olive oil.) And since the fat can impart a slightly gamey taste to meat, we suggest, trimming most of the fat off of your roasts.

Here's our hamburger recipe:

- 1 1lb package ground beef
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- ~ 1/2-1 C breadcrumbs
- 1 pastured egg
- Worcestershire sauce
- salt and pepper

Mix all ingredients. They should hold together when made into a small ball and flattened out - if not, add a 2nd egg. Grill burgers on bbq, or on the stove in a skillet. If cooking in a skillet, add and heat about 1Tbsp olive oil before adding the burger. Makes about 4-6 burgers, depending on size and thickness.

Check out our [website](#) for more of our favorite recipes!



Farm Visitors and Volunteers Welcome!

We love it when people visit our farm. If you have a desire to come out to the farm and get your hands dirty, or just take a tour and talk farming, conservation, land management, etc., give us a call or drop us an email to schedule a time to come on out.

We will have some short term projects for volunteers this summer, so if you'd like to camp or stay in our little travel trailer, that's certainly an option.

And don't forget that there is plenty to do in Yamhill county... check out the [Yamhill Valley Visitors Association](#) to see what else our beautiful county has to offer.

Music and art, anyone?



After maternity leave ended in July, Val started back teaching private piano and guitar lessons. She's still teaching in Hillsboro, and is also teaching in McMinnville as well. She's also available for performing piano music at weddings and parties, so if you know of anyone looking for live music at their event, please send them to Val's website: www.valblaha.com.

In other non-farm related news, Val rediscovered her love of painting this past year. You may not know this, but Val has done artwork since a young age, and painted the tree that is on our website. Before Dalton's birth she did a series of large paintings from Dr. Seuss's The Lorax for the nursery, as well as some watercolors for our friends' nursery. If you or someone you know is interested in having artwork done for a nursery or other room in your house, give Val a call at 503 852 9585.

**Wishing you and your family
good health and good eating!**



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**(we don't receive mail at the farm,
so please use the PO Box
for all correspondence and payments)**

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