

Forage For Thought

The Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance (SWGLA)

Fall 2008

Strengthening the Bond Between Good Stewardship and Healthy Food

Grassfed Beef in the News:

“Grass-fed Beef Clearly Superior” Says new German Study: Results showed that meat from cattle raised on pasture had much healthier fats. Researchers concluded that grass-fed meat is “clearly superior” and “remarkably beneficial”. They stated that grass-fed meat “should be promoted as an important part of a healthy balanced diet.” (*Journal of Agriculture and Food chemistry, June 2008*)

Grassfed Beef Market Growing: “The market potential for grassfed beef is 20-25 percent of the total American beef market, or about \$15 to \$20 billion in annual retail sales,” said Allen Williams of Tallgrass Beef Company at a recent conference in Nebraska. According to Williams, about 2,000 U.S. producers will market grassfed beef this year, worth nearly \$350 million in retail sales.

Williams listed four top challenges for the grass-fed beef industry:

1. **Proper cattle genetics.**
2. **The skill set necessary to manage forage and cattle in a 367-day feeding situation.**
3. **Capturing economies of scale.**
4. **Overall development of infrastructure to process and distribute grassfed beef.**

(*IANR News Service October 11, 2008*)

USDA-FSIS Seeks Comments on Meat labeling Claims: Deadline for comments is Nov 14th. To comment, see the Federal Register at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-24191.htm>, email aga@americangrassfed.org or call 877-774-7277.



JX Ranch, Tucumcari NM

photo by Mimi Sidwell see page 6

USDA Sets New Organic Pasture

Rules: Advocates say the USDA actually got this one right. According to Kathie Arnold, a New York State organic dairy farmer, “This draft rule provides specific language needed for enforcement of one of the central tenets of organically produces livestock — that organic livestock spend a considerable part of their lives in their natural pasture habitat and receive a significant portion of their food from fresh, green, growing pasture.”

A deeper discussion of the pasture dispute can be found in Samuel Fromartz’s book “Organic Inc: Natural Foods and How They Grew.” He blogs at <http://www.chewswise.com>

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Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance 1210 Luisa St. Suite 10 Santa Fe, NM 87505
Office: 505.231.3467 Fax: 888.825.0773 Website: www.swgla.org

GO MOBILE!

By Laurie Bower

The mobile "matanza" in Taos is alive and well. Owned and managed by the Taos Community Economic Development Corporation (TCEDC) and managed by Gilbert Suazo of Taos Pueblo, New Mexico's first mobile livestock slaughter unit services within an approximate 100-mile radius of Taos, NM (although they cannot currently cross out of state) and is one of just five in the US. USDA certified slaughter and processing services are available for beef, pork, lamb, goat and bison, with enough cooler capacity to hang up to 16 beef carcasses.

Benefits of "going mobile" include reduced stress on the animals, the transport fuel and valuable time that the farmer/rancher saves and a tastier final product for the consumer. There is a one time fee of \$80/head



Gilbert Suazo, Manager TCEDC Mobile Matanza

for beef, \$40/head for pork, \$26/head for lamb/goats and \$90/head for bison. To cut and wrap in paper is .45/lb and vacuum sealing is .60/lb.

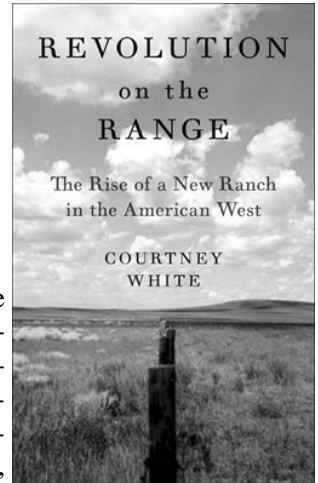
Once the carcasses are hung, the truck heads back to TCEDC in Taos, where they are trans-

ferred to a permanent facility where they can be dry-aged and processed. TCEDC also maintains a truck to transport refrigerated goods to Santa Fe, which can be arranged for an additional fee. TCEDC also has a fully equipped and certified "community kitchen" where individuals and organizations can process food items.

The mobile matanzas/abattoirs concept has received increased interest recently due to the humane animal handling process and economic benefits to ranchers and farmers who do not have adequate nearby processing facilities. For more information on this unique alternative to shipping live animals hundreds of miles for processing, call manager Gilbert Suazo at 575-779-3661(cell) or 575-758-8731(office). Additional information and a full brochure are also available at <http://www.tcedc.org/Programs/MobileLivestockSlaughterUnit/tabid/858/Default.aspx>

BOOK REVIEW:

Publisher's Weekly Review:



"In a time when environmental reporting has become justifiably gloomy, this book is a

refreshing breath of pragmatic optimism. Environmentalist White highlights quirky, visionary individuals and their innovative methods to improve the quality of the ranges and mountains of the West, such as biologist Bill Zeedyk, who restores riparian areas and water tables using sticks and rocks to simply and cheaply mimic a creek's natural meandering, and activist Dan Dagget, who has been able to unite environmentalists and ranchers by focusing on common goals (open space, wildlife, restored streams). White promotes implementation of the "New Ranch," operating "on the principle that the natural processes that sustain wildlife habitat, biological diversity and functioning watersheds are the same processes that make land productive for livestock... where erosion has diminished, where streams and springs, once dry, now flow, where wildlife is more abundant, and where landowners are more profitable as a result." White's vision of stewardship, openness to new ideas, giving as well as taking, and flexibility will inspire anyone who loves humanity or the great outdoors."

To purchase this book, order at www.quiviracoalition.org or call 505-820-2544.

In need of a workshop or tasting in your area to help promote grass-fed livestock or help ranchers get started providing grass-fed livestock? Give us a call we are here to help you! SWGLA 505.231.3467 or visit our website at www.swgla.org



Where's the (New Mexico) (Grassfed) Beef?

By Laurie Bower

Two major reports were released late this summer concerning beef and ranching in New Mexico, each with a different approach and conclusions. One report titled "Adding Value to the New Mexico Beef Industry" was conducted by New Mexico State University and pertained to the NM beef industry as a whole. Another report titled "Study of Grass Fed Beef as a Value Chain in North Central New Mexico and the San Luis Valley, Colorado" was conducted by AIS Development, LLC (Cecilia Ciepiela and Steve Warshawer.) This report concerned, as the title suggests, an evaluation of current markets and opportunities for grassfed beef production, distribution and consumption in the Northern New Mexico area. The findings from both of these reports were presented at a series of community outreach meetings throughout New Mexico this fall. SWGLA members, producers/local ranchers and other concerned parties attended these meetings, providing important feedback concerning the interests of grassfed/natural beef producers.



Grassfed steaks on the grill at Pino Creek Ranch

In their conclusion and recommendations, the statewide beef study concluded that "A state or regional beef branding program combined with a certification process would be the most viable option for adding value to the New Mexico beef market." The conclusion further stated, "There is potential for the addition of natural, lean and humanely grown beef products" but that "a few obstacles do exist..." These obstacles include the ability to maintain a consistent year-round, high quality supply of product (beef) and the necessity for producers to cooperate with each other on a variety of levels. Although a statewide grassfed beef program was considered, it was ruled out due to concerns that "producers would struggle to convince the traditional beef consumer to purchase grass fed beef..."

The grassfed study, on the other hand, was focused on establishing specific recommendations for the grassfed portion of the Northern NM beef industry. The study concluded that there are three options for producers and stakeholders: 1) Small scale direct marketing for producers who do not want to expand beyond 10-20 animals finished each fall. 2) Participate as a supplier to existing "value chains" such as Country Natural Beef and 3) Find a buyer serving the local regional market who will buy the whole carcass and work with a group of producers to develop a local (New Mexico) value chain, along the lines of the partnership between Polyface farms with Chipotle Restaurants. Additional recommendations concerned developing a "line" of natural beef products, establishing standards for breeds and feeds, developing alliances with producers in surrounding area to expand the supply base and redefine "local" as falling within a 4-hour drive time, to include Santa Fe and Albuquerque. A series of "proposed interventions" were also presented in the report, which included a variety of activities that could be implemented by the public/donor sector to facilitate private sector development.

An enormous amount of time, thought and funding has been invested in these reports. They both provide valuable information for evaluating our next best steps toward a more viable future for all involved in the production, distribution and consumption of New Mexico Beef. This month, SWGLA will play an active role in the strategic planning that is now needed to gather stakeholders and develop new strategies for 2009 and beyond. On November 6th, stakeholders in the NM local beef industry gathered in Santa Fe to draft new strategies, and on November 18-19, SWGLA representatives will attend a 2-day Strategic Planning Summit in Albuquerque as part of the New Mexico Beef Initiative. *For a copy of one or both of these reports, contact SWGLA at info@swgla.org or by calling 505-231-3467. Please include either email or mailing address.*

Mission Statement: "SWGLA is an alliance of producers, land managers, conservationists and researchers that promotes and markets grass-fed livestock products through applied research, educations and cooperation in order to improve human, ecological, social and animal health."

Age of Maturity for Criollo Heifers

By Ed L. Fredrickson

Increasing fuel and feed supplementation costs along with the reallocation of water from agriculture to urban uses will alter beef production throughout the western United States. One response is to use beef cattle breeds that better match nutritionally challenging environments common to the West and can sustain themselves without expensive supplemental feeds. Another option is to minimize transportation costs and increase the value of each animal by targeting regional markets. At the USDA's Jornada Experimental Range we are seeking to identify arid land adapted breeds that help producers remain profitable while adapting to these changing conditions.

Our present focus is the Spanish Criollo cattle that first came to the New World on Columbus's second voyage in 1493. Shortly after their introduction to Mexico in 1521, large herds of these prolific animals occupied central Mexico and many coastal regions. In 1598, Criollo cattle were introduced to present day New Mexico and remained the dominant breed until the mid to late 1800's when British investors dominated the U.S. livestock industry. Because of their 400 years of residency, Criollo cattle are likely to be the most adapted cattle to Southwestern conditions available.

One trait we feel is important for regional beef production systems is early maturity. Future conditions should favor animals that can reach maturity during the short period when forage quality and quantity are sufficient for growth. In a two-year study, graduate student Sergio Valverde with the help of reproductive physiologist Dr. Dean Hawkins measured the onset of puberty in Criollo and Angus-Hereford crossbred heifers. In 2006, 7 Criollo and 5 crossbred heifers were used to determine length of the estrous cycle. Heifers grazed the same pasture during the study with free access to water and mineral supplement. Blood samples were collected twice weekly both years. In 2007, 15 Criollo and 15 crossbred heifers were used to determine age at puberty and length of the estrous cycle. During

"Age at puberty is an important factor in estimating the potential productivity of the bovine female"



both years the dams of the crossbred heifers were supplemented, but the dams of the Criollo heifers were not.

Initially, body weights in both 2006 and 2007 were greater for crossbred heifers when compared to Criollo heifers (251.7 and 166.4 \pm 12.9 kg; 236.2 and 158.8 \pm 4.7 kg, respectively). In 2006, weight gains did not differ between breeds (80.5 and 71.1 \pm 4.4 kg for crossbred and Criollo heifers, respectively). In 2007, crossbred heifers gained more than Criollo heifers (128.2 and 91.2 \pm 4.1 kg, respectively). In 2007, body weight at puberty was greater for crossbred heifers than Criollo heifers (323.8 and 213.9 \pm 6.6 kg, respectively). However, Criollo heifers tended to reach puberty earlier than crossbred heifers (363.5 and 376.7 \pm 6.3 days, respectively) with two crossbred heifers not reaching puberty during the study. Estrous cycle length in crossbred and Criollo heifers in both 2006 and 2007 did not differ (18 and 19 \pm 1 days; 18 and 19 \pm 1 days, respectively).

This study suggests that Criollo heifers reach puberty earlier than British breeds with differences being detected during two very good forage years. Breed differences would likely be greater during less favorable conditions typical of the region. Sergio's study supports the idea that New Mexico's true heritage breed, Criollo cattle, may also be a profitable part of New Mexico's future.

SWGLA**Board Members**President**Martin Honegger**

pcr@plateautel.net

Vice President**Cheryl Goodloe**

sralt@hotmail.com

Secretary**Mark Winne**

win5m@aol.com

Treasurer**Walt Marshall**

cbhecc@aol.com

Shane Faulkner

ser@zianet.com

Nancy Ranney

Ranneyranch

@gmail.com

Deborah Madison

Deborahmadison

@earthlink.net

Reese Woodling

Nrwoodling

@comcast.net

Tawnya Laveta

tlaveta@yahoo.com

Mimi Sidwell

sidwell

@jx ranch.com

Director**Laurie Bower**

info@swgla.org

505-231-3467

SWGLA

Suite 10

1210 Louisa Street

Santa Fe, NM

87505

Phone 505.231.3467

Fax 888.825.0773

Visit us at

www.swgla.org**MEMBERS' VOICE****Cut government link to the food chain**

Paul Schwennesen

Letter published in the Tucson Citizen June 25, 2008

A column by Mark Kimble ("A regulatory beef" on Jan. 10) highlighted a growing dispute between the Pima County Health Department and farmers' markets. He suggested government was merely a "step behind" in regulating farmers markets, and that the two sides were just a handshake away from an equitable arrangement to save Tucson's hapless residents from unregulated food.

Well, the tables have turned. Gov. Janet Napolitano has now signed into law an amendment to an exemption that allows food producers to sell their products without the interference and onerous licensing fees the Health Department has been demanding. The new law reads, in part: "The producers of food products on agricultural lands . . . shall never under any pretext be denied or restricted the right to sell and dispose of their products . . . No tax, license or fee shall be imposed, levied upon, demanded or collected from a producer for a sale of a food product." This law, which clarifies the definition of "food" (to now include you'll be glad to know, beef and lamb) is a tremendous boon to the small-scale agricultural producer as well as the tens of thousands of consumers looking for alternatives to the industrial food chain.

While Kimble could not have known that the county's regulatory role would be so significantly reduced, his comments nevertheless betray a misplaced faith in the role of government protection on our dinner plate. A large, obtrusive bureaucracy in the food supply presents two distinct problems: It tends to reduce food quality by eliminating personal accountability from producer and consumer. And it becomes a significant, often insurmountable barrier to entry by new producers, stifling healthy competition and economic liberty.

What's wrong with having the government safeguard our food supply? It sounds eminently reasonable to have a trained, unbiased authority keeping unscrupulous producers from poisoning their clientele. The problem is, it doesn't work. Unscrupulous or negligent producers poison us all the time! How many millions of pounds of ground beef have been recalled this year? Who plans to eat raw tomatoes anytime soon? The standard governmental reply is, "Imagine how much worse it would be without government safeguards!"

This misses the point. As a producer with a raft of bureaucratic "protections" between you and the consumer, there is little or no incentive to create a purer product than your competition because a government agency has "volunteered" to take the heat for you, should anything go awry. In effect, the incentive among producers is to win the race toward the bottom rung, where they can most cheaply and easily meet the minimum standard. If a producer's personal reputation and livelihood were at stake every time a consumer purchased his product, his incentives would be properly placed, and he would continually strive for better and better quality, knowing the competition was doing the same.

Moreover, government intervention in the food industry stifles new entrants with an immense amount of regulation, licensing and fees. This reduces competition and favors larger and larger industrial nodes of production. In turn, these larger production centers grow farther and farther from their clientele, exacerbating the anonymity that makes cutting corners an acceptable practice. Finally, customers become the unwitting accomplices in a centralized food system. We have come to expect food choice to be a price-based activity alone. We place undue reliance on labels and certification; we have forgotten how to seek (and thereby encourage) superior quality in our food. We are what we eat, the saying goes. If what we eat is an overregulated, dislocated shadow of what food once was, what does that make us? Arizona should be commended for empowering, if even in a small way, the vital relationship between producers and consumers, and of limiting central authority in our food choices. Government isn't just a "step behind." It shouldn't even be in the race.

Paul and Sarah Schwennesen own the Double Check Ranch near Winkelman, www.doublecheckranch.com.



JX CATTLE COMPANY, LLC

*Tom and Mimi Sidwell
Tucumcari, NM*

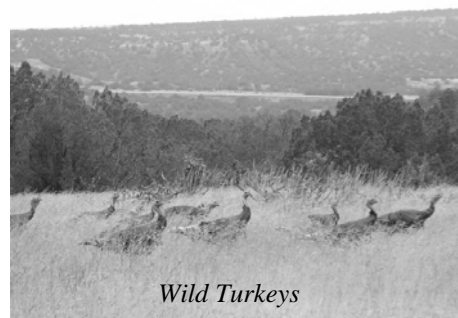


Tom and Mimi Sidwell together run Longhorn cows and Charolais bulls on their 7,000-acre ranch in eastern New Mexico. JX Ranch is located 25 miles south of Tucumcari, along the rugged Caprock which traverses the ranch. This fall they started selling *lean natural beef* to individuals, who may opt to purchase a whole beef, a half or a quarter of a beef. The animals are born and raised on the ranch, have never received any antibiotics,

growth-hormones or animal by-products whatsoever and remain on native pasture until ready for processing, at which time they are transported to Fort Sumner Processing where the customer picks up the meat after 2 – 3 weeks of dry-ageing.



Tom and Mimi are impressed with the hardiness and thriftiness of these Longhorn cows, especially in a drought. “Most other breeds of cattle would have gone down-hill in the last three years when we received none to marginal rain, but these cows just hustled and came out of it like a shining rose. This year we’ve been blessed with good rains, and lots of grass. The Longhorn also seem to be very disease and insect resistant, and we don’t use any chemicals or insecticides on the cattle”. The herd is rotated through the ranch’s many pastures frequently, using holistic range management practices.



Wild Turkeys

Tom and Mimi use horses when moving the cattle, working them slowly and quietly in a no-stress manner. “They are a pleasure to be around, and they are good mommas”.

From April till November, they also take in up to 4 guests at a time, wishing to experience the daily life on a cattle ranch. Guests need to have some riding experience, as they will tag along in the every-day activities on the ranch. This has helped see the ranch through some tough times, and Tom and Mimi enjoy getting to meet people from all walks of life, and from all parts of the world.



Mimi and Tom Sidwell

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 18-19: Strategic Planning Summit, New Mexico Beef Initiative Albuquerque, NM contact NM Cattle Growers at nmcga@nmagriculture.org or call 505-247-0584

December 4-5: "Small, Smart, & Special": with Allen Nation, Joel Salatin and others Harrisburg, PA For more info call 717-939-7841 or visit www.stockmangrassfarmer.net

11-14: Joint Stockman's Convention, Albuquerque, NM: The annual meeting of the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association (NMCGA), the New Wool Growers, Inc. (NMWG), The New Mexico Federal Lands Council (NMFLC), the New Mexico Cowbelles (NMCB) and the Dairy Producers of New Mexico (DPNM).

Coming up in 2009:

February:

5-7 Lexington, KY: American Grassfed Association presents: "Grazing Kentucky", with keynote speaker: Wendell Barry for more information visit www.americangrassfed.org call 877-774-7277 or email aga@americangrassfed.org

8-12: Society for Range Management, 62nd Annual Meeting Albuquerque, NM (www.rangelands.org)

29—March 1: New Mexico Organic Farming Conference, Albuquerque, NM (more info and registration form at <http://cahe.nmsu.edu/organicfarming/> or call 505-473-1004.)

April 6-9: Southwest Marketing Network Conference, Durango

November 4,5,6: Quivira Coalition 8th Annual Conference - Celebration of Aldo Leopold

Grassfed Beef in the News: (from page 1)

New Food Labels Show Country of Origin The USDA now requires retailers to display the country of origin for a wide variety of foods, including beef, lamb, chicken and pork. One exception is processed foods, such as sausage and any cooked, cured or salted meat product. The new country-of-origin-labeling (COOL) rule doesn't apply to restaurants or to foods produced or packaged before September 30th, 2008 (plus a six month grace period.) A butcher shop selling only meat is exempted, and hamburger only requires labeling that lists the countries the meat *might* have come from. According to Allen Nation of The Stockman Grass Farmer, the new regulation is "a joke. Once again Congress earns its dismal approval rating."

Animal Rights Moving to The Political Center

The animal rights movement is moving to the political center according to the New York Times Magazine. The Humane Society, Farm Sanctuary and PETA are all re-framing their messages into a new focus on "animal protection". The Humane society's new president, Wayne Pacelle insists that the Society's message remain both non-partisan and not anti-meat. With plans to use the NRA as its model, 10.3 million members and a budget of \$127 million, the long term goal is to end all confinement animal agriculture through state ballot initiatives, lobbying and continued media exposure of its worst abuses. *From Allen Nation's blog, www.stockmangrassfarmer.net*

What's Cookin?



Green Chile Stew from the McNeil Ranch Monte Vista, CO

- 3 pounds Grassfed Ground Beef or 1 tube Diamond F Brand ground beef
- 6 Cups roasted and peeled green chiles chopped
- 2 Medium onions finely diced
- 2 Cloves garlic finely diced
- 5 Cups liquid (water or preferably homemade chicken stock)*
- 2 TBS. Powdered cumin
- 1/4 Tsp. Oregano

- 3 TBS. Olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 3 TBS. Flour (optional)

Sautee onions and garlic in olive oil, Add ground beef stirring frequently until meat is browned. Add chiles, mixing thoroughly. Add cumin, oregano, salt and pepper. Add flour if thick consistency is desired Add liquid. Bring to a boil. Reduce to simmer and simmer for at least an hour.

Depending on whether you want a stew-like or a soup-like consistency you can thicken with flour or not.

The Western Center for
Risk Management Education
Washington State University Extension



Thank You!
SWGLA's work is also supported by **The New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Farm to Table, The Quivira Coalition, and our Private Donors.**



SWGLA—Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance
1210 Luisa Street, Suite 10
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Join SWGLA Today

New and Renewing members can send their \$25.00 tax deductible membership to:
SWGLA, 1210 Luisa Street, Suite 10 Santa Fe, NM 87505

You may also send your tax deductible contribution to the above address, as ***ongoing funding is needed to support SWGLA outreach activities.***

Name (please print) _____

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Are you interested in becoming a SWGLA Producer? _____