Wine-Fed Beef Relaxed, Better Tasting

Due to a little something extra in their afternoon ration, some beef herds in British Columbia's Okanagan wine region have a distinct smell.

"You can always smell which pen is getting the wine. They smell like a bunch of winos," laughs Janice Ravndahl, who came up with the idea to feed beef cattle wine a couple years ago. A television chef who fed beer to a pig inspired her. Living in the heart of wine country, with her husband working for a winery, she wondered what effect wine would have on cattle.

After experimenting with rations, she and her beef producer brother, Darrel Timm, believe that wine-fed beef has enhanced flavor, is more tender with finer marbling, and has sweeter tasting fat. They call their operation Sezmu Meats, named after the Egyptian god of the wine press. Their goal is to brand Sezmu as a high-quality beef.

Though university and nutritional studies have just begun, regional chefs praise the texture, flavor and tenderness of the meat and say that it's recognizably different, starting with the dark red color.

"It's more tender and more forgiving in cooking — it remains tender," Ravndahl says. "The burgers are fantastically juicy. My kids notice the difference right away."

She and her brother first experimented with wine they made themselves to feed his Angus herd. After adding the wine to the diet for the last 30 days before going to market, the cows didn't make the grade they had hoped for. But they could see changes in the meat.

They upped the wine ration to 90 days, using the sediment-filled wine that's filtered off at local wineries and generally used for fertilizer or thrown away.

The beef was dry-aged for 21 days and taste-tested in April 2009. With support from chefs, Ravndahl began the complicated process of marketing to consumers and finding ways to get extra value for all parts of the animal and not just the choice cuts. Sezmu beef is served at high-end restaurants in British Columbia as well as in hamburgers at other restaurants.

Her brother's herd is raised on pasture until the cattle are close to finishing. Then they are sent to a feedlot. When they are in their final 90 days they are given about a liter of the wine residue with their afternoon ration.

Janice Ravndahl says wine-fed beef has enhanced flavor, is more tender with finer marbling, and has sweeter tasting fat.

"Wine is antimicrobial so it helps reduce E. coli in beef," Ravndahl says. There seems to be a reduction in methane, and the herd has a different smell. Steers also seem to be more relaxed.

Ravndahl noted that Canada's approved feed list covers wine, and that veterinarians don't have concerns about wine affecting health.

Retail prices for the meat run about 10 percent above organic beef prices.

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Salvaged "Farm Wood" Makes Beautiful Furniture

Tim Blanski used to be a company man, climbing a corporate ladder. But his hobby was woodworking and he's always loved old farm buildings. About 10 years ago, he got tired of the corporate grind and bought a small business called the Granary Woodshops. Now he's a fulltime woodworker in the scenic countryside near Spring Grove, Minnesota. His specialty is building custom furnishings using lumber and timbers from barns and other farm buildings.

"I take materials that would be otherwise burned or buried and give them new life in someone's home."

Blanski looks for weathering, deep textures, large knots and burls in the wood homes. He has used quarter sawn oak from feed troughs for a dining room table; 70-year-old pasture fencing for trim on sofa tables; rough cut lumber for elegant jewelry boxes; rotting horse harness leather found in an old barn became decorative trim on table aprons; and small copper scraps became accent corners on cabinets.

"I get calls all the time from people who want me to salvage wood from an old building," says Blanski. "I could literally have thousands of board feet of barn board, beams and posts. The unique features I look for are often found in smaller buildings like cribs, bins, fencing and broken down barns that are very weathered."

Blanski maintains his cache of lumber inside an old barn and several outbuildings on his own farm. Planks, boards, beams, trim and moldings are piled neatly. He complements these weathered pieces with twigs, branches, limbs, pine cones and interesting burls that he finds on walks in the woods.

"I'm the world's slowest hiker in a woods," Blanski says, "because I'm always seeing something on a forest floor that I can use." One forest treasure that he couldn't carry home was a large oak burl that weighs nearly a ton and is 5 ft. tall. He had it lifted onto his trailer with a front end loader and will have a local sawmill cut the burl into smaller boards. At some point it might become a table, mirror frame, armoire or a headboard.

Tim Blanski builds beautiful furniture, using lumber and timber from barns and other farm buildings.

"This is a very gratifying business," says Blanski, "and the creative possibilities are endless. The furniture and art pieces I create are singular designs with artistic expression, but they're also functional home furnishings." He sells through galleries in the Midwest and online to customers across the country.

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"Corn Yarn" Stronger Than Wool

A Minnesota couple that recently started selling yarn made out of corn fiber, says it offers some advantages over conventional yarns.

Paul Tatge and Meg Mjoness of Benson, Minn., exhibited at the recent Big Iron show in West Fargo, N. Dak. They've formed a company called Corny Goodness that sells Ingeo – corn fiber that's made into yarn and then hand-dyed. The yarn comes in 100-gram, 240-yard skeins and is available in 30 different colors.

The couple also sells patterns for making hats, shopping bags, scarves, shawls, stocking caps, baby caps, berets, neck warmers, and placemats.

"We ply and dye the fiber ourselves in our home. It makes a beautiful yarn," says Tatge. "Corn yarn is good for farmers because it's another use for a crop they already grow. It's the world's first manmade fiber made 100 percent from an annually renewable plant resource."

According to Tatge, Cargill owns the process that turns corn kernels into fine fibers, which are then spun into thread. The starch/sugar in the kernels is fermented, resulting in lactic acid that's used to produce polylactide resin (PLA), which is then extruded and spun into fiber.

"We buy the thread from a company in South Carolina, and then ply multiple threads together to make the yarn," says Tatge. "Corn yarn resembles natural fibers but has a 'pearly sheen'."

According to Tatge, corn yarn is breathable, wicks moisture, comfortable, and has natural insulating warmth. It's also color fast, ultraviolet ray resistant, wrinkle resistant, as well as resistant to odor-causing bacteria, microbes, mildews, and molds.

Corn yarn is washable and can be dry-cleaned. "It's much stronger than cotton and gains strength with multiple washings, although the cause for this isn't known," says Tatge. "It's a very durable fiber that softens up with use. The more you use it the nicer it feels. However, corn yarn can't be ironed, because at 350 degrees the fibers will melt."

The couple plans to soon offer a corn-and-wool blend. "Corn fiber is stronger than wool so the two materials complement each other. The wool has just enough corn in it so the wool won't shrink when you wash it," says Tatge.

Corn yarn costs more than acrylic yarn but less than wool or alpaca yarn, says Tatge. "You might say it's the cheapest of the exotic fibers."

A single skein sells for $12 plus S&H.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Paul Tatge, Corny Goodness, 1819 Kansas Ave., Benson, Minn. 56215 (ph 320 304-1399; Paul@cornygoodness.com; www.cornygoodness.com).

"Ingeo" yarn is made out of corn fiber and then hand-dyed. It's available in 30 different colors.