



Greetings Friends!

According to the calendar we are a little late with the newsletter this year, but if we're following the thermometer we're probably right on schedule! I'm sure you are all as ready as we are to see green outside. The temperature swings that we encountered over the past 5 months have made this the toughest winter our cattle have had to go through. You'll be happy to know our cattle, hogs and chickens are doing just fine!

Thank you for your support throughout the past year. 2010 was our fourth official year of selling pasture raised meat and we've been busy. We finished just over 40 beef animals, 30 hogs, and 1000 broiler chickens. Our contact list has almost four times as many families as it did a year ago! We are doing as much as we can to keep up and still be standing at the end of the day, or at least upright long enough to return emails! We are very thankful you have chosen us to help feed your families.

Here are a couple of our favorite quotes from the past year:

"I bought chicken from the grocery the other day it was gross!"

"The taste is great, the price is right and meanwhile we can feel good about our health and the environment."

Our all-time favorite: *"Your ground beef is the **bestest** \$%*@ ever!"*

BEEF

As many of you know by now we purchased 30 head of Murray Grey cattle from Prairie Hill Farms in Palmyra in January. We are really excited about the addition to the herd. These cattle are very easy going and a pleasure to work with. Our herd is now predominantly Greys, with a handful of Angus and British Whites.

Several of you have asked what the difference is between the breeds in regards to eating quality of the meat. The answer is; very little. Tenderness is mostly dictated by genetics and the amount of connective tissue the animal has. All of the cattle we are using are genetically-tender. Low stress for cattle also makes for tender beef, which includes plenty of grasses and water, and having the cattle used to routines of changing pastures and hauling.

Meat juiciness is directly related to the degree of marbling. Intramuscular fat is the last fat deposit the animal puts on. The primary determiner of marbling is how close the animal is to its mature size when it is harvested. We are very picky about sending steers to the processor too early. These animals aren't raised in a factory and it sometimes takes longer than expected; thank you for being patient and understanding.

Another question we've been asked a lot lately is, "How much meat will I actually take home when purchasing a whole, half or quarter cow?" Much like tenderness, meat-to-bone ratio is largely dictated by genetics. Big-boned, long-legged, narrow-chested animals have a lower meat-to-bone ratio than thick, full-bodied animals. Ours are the latter. The cattle we processed this past year have yielded right around 65 percent. 65 percent of the hanging carcass weight ends up in the freezer. By breeding our cows to better bulls we expect to push this number up to 70 percent. What does this all mean? We get paid the same whether you take home 55 percent of the carcass, or 70 percent. The difference is you paid over 25 percent **MORE *per pound*** for that big boned, long-legged, narrow-chested cow you bought somewhere other than Miller Brothers!

Thank you to everyone that has pre-ordered the larger quantities of beef. We have orders for almost half of what we will process in the next 12 months! We haven't set processing dates for the fall just yet, but anticipate having some ready to go in early September. We will be offering the assortment packages again, but will have a limited number available. If you don't have the freezer space for a quarter, find a friend or two to split it with! We are excited to add Pastrami to our list of products this year. It is made at Cedar Road Meats with our grass-fed beef and the customers, who have tried it, love it! It is a great way to break from regular old deli meats, and it comes sliced for sandwiches in half pound vacuum sealed packages. This item is not included on the order form. Just send us a separate email to order anytime throughout the year.

PORK & POULTRY

We are still raising the restaurant-preferred Berkshire breed for their complex meat flavoring and solid dense quality. Pasture raised pork also vary in size and are not the cookie-cutter variety. In line with this, we are going to try something a little different this season with our happy hogs. We feel that you will get more of exactly what you want by ordering half and whole hogs only, then customizing the exact cuts you want with our processor.

Hogs are scheduled to go to the processor in September this year. A half hog should only take up about 3 cubic feet of freezer space; find some friends to spilt it with if you don't have room!

Unlike beef cattle, pigs and chickens require a grain ration to supplement their pasture diet. This ration is derived from corn and roasted soybeans. Grain prices have been on the rise since last summer and are at near all-time highs as this is written. Our prices have increased slightly to reflect these changes.

We will be raising about 1000 broiler chickens again this year. We only order chicks to fill the orders we have received. We are planning on having 250 birds ready for pick-up once a month June-September. Orders are first-come first-serve; once we hit our capacity of 250 birds for a given month, orders will be moved to the next month. We would like to give everyone an opportunity to get their hands on some birds in June. Please limit June orders to what you will consume before July, if at all possible.

The flock of laying hens survived this winter better than last year and the response to our eggs has been overwhelmingly positive. The only complaint we were hearing was that we didn't have enough, so we doubled the number of birds in the flock this spring to try to keep up. Eggs are self-serve at the farm house on Highway K. Please bring your egg cartons back!

We get asked all the time if our chickens are “free-range.” This type of marketing verbiage along with, “natural” and “organic” is completely meaningless; unless you understand the protocol of the person producing your food. If the grass is green and growing, our birds are out there eating it. They are housed in portable hoop houses with no floors, where the sun shines in, fresh breeze blows through and each bird has access to as much grass as it can eat. Our label is “pasture raised” which translates into a more natural environment for the animal resulting in a superior product to those you will find in the “free range” section at the grocery store. You can be sure there is no gray area when it comes to the standard we have for raising our poultry.

PROTOCOL

Punctuality at pick-up times will be extremely important this year. We are finding this to be our biggest obstacle in the poultry venture. We are more flexible than other farms because our birds are frozen; but please don't take advantage this. Our freezers have to be empty each month to accommodate the incoming group of birds. Pick-ups will be held on Saturday mornings before noon. We will notify you at least a week in advance of your pick-up dates. If we do not hear from you within **one week** after the pick-up date we will sell your birds to someone else. This gives everyone a couple of weeks to make arrangements with us.

ODDS AND ENDS

While we will continue to expect high quality from the butchers we deal with, we must do so with appreciation for their services. Without custom butcher shops, the direct-market farm is immediately extinct as it is illegal to butcher animals on the farm. Please tell Barb and Marvin at Cedar Road Meats, thank you when you see them this year. Scheduling processing appointments months in advance can be tricky and they are always very accommodating.

Also, Miller Brothers Grass Farm is on Facebook! Check out pictures, share your comments, recipes, ideas, and keep up on the very latest MBGF news! Let us know how much you “LIKE US.”

ORDERING *(please read carefully!)*

Getting order forms returned successfully last year was a catastrophe on our end. Hopefully we have the kinks worked out this spring! The order form is a Microsoft Excel file. Please download it and save it to your computer, complete the form and save it again. Then attach it to an email and return it to orders@millerbrothersgrassfarm.com. We will send you a confirmation email when we have your order filed. Please be patient, we always get a lot of these the first couple of days after this goes out. ☺

Again, we thank you for supporting your local food producers!