

Wolfe Island Business: Pykeview Meadows Bison Farm

Spotlight Staff

Jason and Christina Pyke bought their first Bison (*North American Bison same as Buffalo, not to be confused with a water buffalo*) back in the winter of 1995 and they were delivered in the spring of 1996.

Therefore, Jason, his dad and brother worked at building the fences over that winter to get ready for the animals to come in the spring. They received a herd of 30, which came from a farm in Northern Ontario near Earlton. With that shipment there would have been 27 females and 3 breeding bulls. It was a variety of cows, a half dozen calves, yearlings, and two year olds. It was a good mixture of animals to start.

"If you're looking at buying bison, you can buy them the same way as you can beef cattle", says Christina. "You can buy a whole herd which is what we did. You can buy a young calf so you can grow with the young animals, or if you want to start off with your meat market than you can purchase some calves, bull and yearlings to help to get your meat market established. It really depends on what your goal is with the animals. For some people they just like to have the animal on their farm as a hobby for them but for us it's a venturous part of our farm".

Bison prices compared to Beef is a little more expensive than the price of beef that you would find at the grocery store. You would find the price more comparable to that of naturally raised beef. "As per cuts, we do everything like roasts, steaks, sausages. We have everything from your lower ground meat and hamburgers right up to your most tender steaks like your tenderloin and rib-eye and prime rib roasts as well", says Christina. "There is

something for everyone with Buffalo meat. It all depends on what you are looking for. We supply meat to a few Restaurants in Kingston and to a few local butcher shops in the area, and we also carry a few various products and cuts. The restaurants carry some of the high-end steaks whereas we have another Restaurant in downtown Kingston that takes the 5 oz. burger patty and puts it on their regular menu".

One of the main reasons to eat Bison is because of the low fat content. Bison has only 2.42 grams of fat (per 100 grams of cooked lean meat) compared to the 9.28 grams that is in Beef. Skinless Chicken also has more fat in it (7.41 gr.) than the Bison. Calorie wise, Bison has only 143 kcal compared to 211 kcal in beef and 212 kcal in Pork.



"It's kind of like a gourmet health food and we're not using any animal bi-products", says Christina. "There are no growth hormones. No additives at all, it is a natural meat and that is what people are looking for now. They want to know where their meat is coming from; they want to know what the animals are fed. Everything that our animals are fed is raised right here on the farm. In the winter we feed them round bales of hay, in the summertime they are in pastures so they eat grass, we also supplement them with haylage, corn foliage, a little bit of grain and their salt and mineral. Their diet is very comparable to the beef animal except they are naturally raised".

A bi-product of having the bison meat is the hide of the animal. After the animals are slaughtered the Pykes take home the raw hide, and after they are salted

down they take the raw hide to a place outside of Guelph where they tan the raw hide in big sheets of leather (this happens usually a couple times a year). Sometimes the hides can be made into robes, which are great for coats or rugs. A February slaughter leaves the animals fur with still having the winter coat, which is thicker for items like coats or rugs. Once the hide has been turned to leather, Jason and Christina send it off to another company in the Rockwood area, where they make slippers, gloves, headbands and hats.

The only drawback to having a Bison farm is that you have to market the product yourself, and since some people may be leery of trying something new, that may have been the biggest hurdle to get over for the Pykes. But none the less, the Jason and Christina have never looked back on the venture that they began in 1996. "Consumer education is what has helped us find the success of marketing our product. And once people have tried the meat, they find that it is a good tasting"

Today the Pykes have between 130 and 140 animals. Springtime is the calving season so they have about 15 - 20 calves so far, but there should be a few more coming. The bulls, cows and calves are split into different pastures so it sometimes makes it difficult to have an accurate count.

Home owners can call Jason and Christina at the farm and make arrangements for picking up any order that they may want to make, or they can go to the Kingston market and pick up their order there. Special orders can also be picked up if you call ahead. The Pykes also sell their meat at the Kingston Market on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at the Market behind City Hall. Call the Pykes at 613-385-2941 to find out more about raising Bison, the bi-products that they have, or to place a meat order.

BISON