

Meat plant opens

By PAM GOLDEN

WHITE Oak Pastures of Bluffton, Ga., celebrated the grand opening of the state's first on-farm meat processing plant with an old-fashioned gathering.

Folks who arrived late had to walk in from the highway.

"I'm blessed to have so many folks come out here to help us celebrate," Will Harris, owner of White Oak Pastures, told the crowd shortly before the ribbon cutting. "Thank you."

The celebration included local wine from Still Pond Wineries of Arlington, Ga., and cooking courtesy of Cow Camp Cooking and Cowboy Logic, Parrott, Ga.

Harris raises about 650 head of cattle on his fifth-generation ranch.

In addition to butchering his own beef, the new processing plant will service neighboring farms and will accept goats, sheep and cattle. Harris plans

Key Points

- White Oak Pastures opens Georgia's first on-farm meat processing plant.
- The facility processes beef, goat, lamb, and eventually, pork.
- The Bluffton farm raises grass-fed beef and is Certified Humane.



THANK YOU: White Oak Pastures owner Will Harris acknowledges the applause from friends and neighbors during the grand opening celebration of Georgia's first on-farm meat processing plant.

eventually to process hogs at the 5,329-square-foot facility, as well.

Harris shared the spotlight at the grand opening with Whole Foods Market Inc., the OneGeorgia Authority and the Early County Economic Development Authority, each of which contributed funds to the project.

Harris funded the \$1.5 million



COME 'N' GET IT! Sonie Chesnut and Joel Hayes, both of Cow Camp Cooking and Cowboy Logic, Parrott, Ga., rustle up a bit of grub for those who helped celebrate the opening of a meat processing plant at White Oak Pastures in Bluffton, Ga.

project with a \$461,000 low-interest loan from the state of Georgia, a \$450,000 low-interest loan from Whole Foods and \$150,000 from the Early County Economic Development Authority.

"We believe this is the way we need to be going: Georgia-grown," said Georgia Deputy Agriculture Commissioner Terry Coleman during opening ceremonies. "We can be leaders in food production in the United States and in the world."

Harris also built an 18,000-square-foot building adjacent to the processing plant to house pens for the animals; both facilities were designed by the world's foremost expert on humane treatment of animals, Temple Grandin.

The facility received the Certified Humane designation from Virginia-based Humane Farm Animal Care, a leading nonprofit dedicated to animal welfare. The Certified Humane distinction mandates that producers raise beef without antibiotics or growth hormones and in a humane environment that allows them to "engage in their natural behaviors."

The new facility also significantly expands distribution of White Oak's beef. The Publix supermarket chain has been carrying White Oak Pastures Grassfed Ground Beef at its stores throughout the Southeast since 2005.

For more about White Oak Pastures, visit www.whiteoakpastures.com.

