

Grass-fed beef producer to build the only free-range poultry plant in 3 states
White Oak joins Global Animal Partnership's 5-step animal welfare standards

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White Oak Pastures Owner Will Harris

White Oak Pastures, Inc., Georgia's largest grass-fed beef producer, said Thursday it broke ground on what will be the only poultry plant that processes free range birds in Georgia, Florida and Alabama.

The Bluffton, Ga.-based company, which has the largest USDA-certified organic farm in Georgia, said its increasing its poultry numbers in order to further develop its Serengeti Plains rotational grazing model, which means large ruminants (cows), followed by small ruminants (sheep), followed by birds (chickens and turkeys).

The grazing model allows pastures to be grazed and fertilized in three different ways.

"We have learned that this production model is undisputedly the best management system for our land and our livestock," said White Oak Owner Will Harris.

The company plans to start selling chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese after August.

White Oak Pastures beef can be purchased at more than 1,000 Publix supermarkets throughout the Southeast and at Whole Foods Market locations from Miami to Princeton, N.J.

The beef is distributed by Halperns' Purveyors of Steak and Seafood, Destiny Organics, Tree of Life and Buckhead Beef gourmet beef distributors, a division of Sysco.

White Oak is also now participating in the Global Animal Partnership's Five-Step Animal Welfare Rating Standards program, recently implemented at Whole Foods Market stores nationwide.

Step One prohibits cages and crates; Step Two requires environmental enrichment for indoor production systems; Step Three, outdoor access; Step Four, pasture-based production; Step Five, an animal-centered approach with all physical alterations prohibited; and, finally, Step Five+, the entire life of the animal spent on an integrated farm.

White Oak Pastures is one of only two farms in the country to receive the Step Five certification on its chickens, and one of only a handful of farms to receive the Step Four certification on its cattle.

White Oak Pastures cranked up operations at its \$2 million, on-farm, USDA-inspected processing plant in the spring of 2008 allowing it to significantly expand production and distribution of its beef, as well as beef raised by ranchers in the region.

White Oak Pastures is one of only two on-farm, USDA-inspected grass-fed beef plants in the country.

All White Oak Pastures cattle are raised under two sustainability standards: the Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) program, which is a free certification for farms raising their animals with high welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range, and a standard developed in 2008 by the American Grassfed Association (AGA), which represents more than 300 grass-fed livestock producers.

The AGA standards are primarily based on four precepts: total forage diet, no feedlots, no antibiotics and no added hormones. The AGA grass-fed claim applies to ruminants only – cattle, sheep and eventually goats – not poultry or pork.

The AWA audits AGA members' grass-fed meat operations. AGA members who adhere to both the AWA and AGA standards are able to use both American Grassfed Association and Animal Welfare Approved labels on their products.

The annual audits are provided to the farms at no cost, and, additionally, farmers bearing the seals are provided free technical advice and marketing support.