

## **Ga. Farm Produces and Processes Humanely-Raised Grass-Fed Beef**

[http://agr.georgia.gov/00/article/0,2086,38902732\\_0\\_119617327,00.html](http://agr.georgia.gov/00/article/0,2086,38902732_0_119617327,00.html)

While the vast majority of American beef is produced in feedlots where cattle are fattened on grain, a few farmers and ranchers are producing superb beef from cattle fed only on grass. Will Harris of White Oak Pastures is one such producer that is producing prize-winning beef on grass at his farm in Bluffton, Ga.

In addition to producing grass-fed beef, White Oak Pastures has constructed its own on-site slaughterhouse with a Georgia Department of Agriculture/USDA inspector on premises to insure all the meat products meet federal standards. The processing plant, which had its grand opening April 26, is designed to process beef according to rigorous humane animal treatment standards and to minimize environmental impact.

Although consumers are increasingly favoring locally-grown foods, getting the product into the marketplace can still be a challenge for the producer. So Harris decided to try and convince a few chefs to add White Oak Pastures beef to their menus. With the help of Georgia Green Foodservice Alliance (a collaboration of the Georgia Restaurant Association, the Atlanta Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, Georgia Organics and the Georgia Department of Agriculture's 'Georgia Grown' program), a field trip was scheduled in late July to enable some of Atlanta's top chefs to see how his beef was prepared, from the cattle in the field to the final product produced in the slaughterhouse.

"It is more humane for the animals and, without a doubt, is better for the environment to have a closed production loop on the farm," said Harris. Prior to completion of the 5,329 square-foot processing facility, Harris transported his cattle to a processing plant 100 miles away. Now Harris saves on transportation costs, reduces the use of fossil fuels, and his cattle do not have to endure the stress caused by loading and hauling.

Harris said he thinks his beef is better and healthier for consumers "because our animals spend their lives as nature intended, roaming freely in the pasture and grazing on grass." He noted that grass-fed beef is lower in saturated fat and higher in essential nutrients, such as Omega-3, a fatty acid believed to reduce the risk of coronary disease. Harris added that he does not use hormones or antibiotics on his cattle, nor does he apply pesticides and chemical fertilizers to the land.

"Many consumers desire more locally-grown foods," said Commissioner of Agriculture Tommy Irvin, "and we at the Georgia Department of Agriculture want to nurture operations, such as White Oak Pastures, that are working hard to provide consumers with those farm products."

Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture Terry Coleman, who participated in the field trip, noted that the demand for locally-grown products was outpacing the supply. "Our department will be participating in a number of events such as this one to help connect producers with those potential buyers that can increase the exposure and demand for their products," Coleman said.

He explained that the Georgia Department of Agriculture will be hosting its second annual Georgia Grown Food Show August 18 to bring commercial food buyers and hospitality officials together with local producers. The event will be held 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Exhibition Hall at the Atlanta State Farmers Market in Forest Park.

"This food show will allow Georgia producers to network with buyers, food retailers, restaurateurs, chefs and others in the hospitality industry that believe it is important to buy agricultural products locally to ensure freshness, superior taste and quality," Irvin said.

"Our department can help guide producers through the process of getting their products from the farm and into the hands of consumers," Coleman explained. He noted that experts and governmental officials will be available at the event to help any farmer interested with information regarding marketing, financing, distribution, and

exporting of their products. “The food show is partially paid for by the specialty crop funds in the Farm Bill,” Coleman noted. “We would like to thank Senator Saxby Chambliss and our Congressional delegation for making sure fresh fruits and vegetables are supported along with traditional commodity items.”

For more information about White Oak Pastures, visit website [www.whiteoakpastures.com](http://www.whiteoakpastures.com). Producers interested in more information about the Georgia Department of Agriculture’s Georgia Grown program should contact Vernon Mullins at (706) 595-3408. For other marketing assistance, contact the department’s International Trade and Homeland Security Division at (404) 656-3740.

*Editor’s Note: As another means of helping Georgia producers with their marketing efforts, the Georgia Department of Agriculture and the Georgia Department of Economic Development are working in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Transportation on rules and regulations to help boost the state’s agricultural tourism industry. Once the draft rules and regulations are completed, they will be published for public comment.*