

## **Sysco's gourmet beef distributor picks up White Oak's grass-fed product**

Georgia-based producer expands into markets as new facility helps grows supply

by *Sustainable Food News*

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Sysco Corporation's Buckhead Beef division is now carrying product from White Oak Pastures, Inc., Georgia's largest grass-fed beef producer.

The gourmet beef distributor is selling all cuts of White Oak's beef to fine restaurants throughout the South, said Will Harris, owner of White Oak, which also sells its products through its oldest customers, natural and organic foods distributor Tree of Life, Inc.

The Bluffton, Ga.-based grass-fed beef producer raises about 650 head of cattle on a fifth-generation ranch, which is also the largest USDA-certified organic farm in Georgia.

"We hope that chefs and restaurateurs who are interested in humanely raised, environmentally-sustainable, locally grown, gourmet (did we mention prize-winning) beef will contact their Buckhead Beef representative and add White Oak Pastures Beef to their menus," Harris said.

Buckhead Beef operates out of in Atlanta, Ga. The division also runs Buckhead Beef NE in South Plainfield, N.J., and Buckhead Beef FL in Auburndale, Fla.

Starting in October, Whole Foods Markets, Inc. will be offering White Oaks' beef in all its Florida stores. White Oak steaks, roasts, and ground beef have been selling at Whole Foods' Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and South Carolina stores for several months.

White Oak's beef can also be purchased at more than 200 Publix supermarkets throughout the Southeast

Hoping to grab its share of online sales, White Oak also said it will soon be selling its beef through its [Web site](#).

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

"We no longer pollute the environment and stress our cattle by hauling them all over the country for harvest and distribution," Harris said. "It is the only farmer owned plant in the country, of this type, that we know of."

The 5,329 square-foot processing plant is a zero-waste facility as it utilizes a \$60,000 anaerobic digester to transform waste into organic fertilizer, and a 30,000 gallon septic system to recycle wash-down water.

White Oak's farm is certified through the Georgia Crop Improvement Association's Certified Organic Program.

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

The facility received the Certified Humane designation from Virginia-based Humane Farm Animal Care, a leading nonprofit dedicated to animal welfare. The farm and packing plant are also 'Animal Welfare Approved' by the Animal Welfare Institute.

The company also opened its on-farm retail store selling all L.A.S.H. (Local, Artisan, Sustainable, & Humane) food.

In March, White Oak beef won the Grand Prize in the Flavor of Georgia contest besting over 160 other Georgia products that were entered. In August, the company was selected by the University of Georgia to receive their Award of Excellence.