

WHAT GEORGIA TASTES LIKE

by Peter Vinelli

What does Georgia taste like? If you ask different people, you'll get responses like fried chicken, barbecue or maybe biscuits. But these recipes can be (and are) made anywhere in the world. To know what Georgia tastes like, you have

take care of us," says Harris. "Without realizing it, my family went through a period of time in which we didn't do these things very well. We used chemical fertilizers and pesticides on our land, and we used hormone implants and confinement feeding for our cattle. These were all consid-

ers send calves 1,000-plus miles to industrial feedlots immediately after they are weaned from their mothers, and it is not uncommon for these facilities to feed 100,000 head of cattle at a time, not allowing them to ever step foot on pasture."

However, Harris needed a distribution system since Bluffton is not exactly a quick drive from the city. This is where Whole Foods came in. Whole Foods has recently made local food a priority in its stores. Harris began talking to Whole Foods in 2006. At the end of 2007, Harris' beef was being sold in Whole Foods stores throughout Atlanta. Whole Foods labels it as "Local Grass-Fed Beef" in the meat case. It was so successful that Harris had to build his own processing facility to keep up with demand. Here, Whole Foods was also able to help.

"The Whole Foods Market Local Producer Loan Program was set up specifically to assist farmers like Will Harris," says Joey Herndon, vice president of purchasing for Whole Foods Market's South Region. "By offering support to Will's expansion, we are able to bring a better product to our shoppers while reducing the environmental footprint it takes to do so. We are delighted to carry Will's fresh, local grass-fed beef in our stores."

On April 26, the ribbons were cut on the new processing plant. Now, Harris's beef will be better than ever.

"Having this plant on our farm means we will never again have to load cattle that were born and raised here onto an 18-wheeler," says Harris. "It is more humane for the animals and without a doubt better for the environment to have a closed production loop on the farm."

Also, Harris is looking to help his fellow farmers as well. With White Oak Pastures' expansion, several southwest Georgia family farmers will also avoid shipping their cattle long distances by being invited to bring their beef to Harris' plant for slaughter and processing.

"At least several farmers in our community will now have access to an old-fashioned, artisan-style butchering process," says Harris. "This will allow them to step out of the industrial beef processing complex and give them the ability to market their products as local, a label consumers are seeking."

According to Alice Rolls, executive director of Georgia Organics, White Oak Pastures is on the forefront of a more sustainable agriculture in Georgia. "Will is not just a farmer, but a true leader," says Rolls. "He is creating sustainable, healthy grass-fed beef and revitalizing local, small-scale processing in our rural communities as an alternative to the factory farm mentality so prevalent in today's agriculture."

So now, everyone in Georgia can buy local grass-fed beef. You have never had a steak taste so good! That's what a Georgia steak tastes like!

For more information, go to www.whiteoakpastures.com.



Will Harris (in cowboy hat) and friends

to go beyond the recipe and go to the ingredients. Tomatoes, corn, peaches, collards and pecans all taste better when they are grown locally by Georgians for Georgians. The French call this *terroir*, meaning that when you visit a place the food will taste different because the soil and climate and history of a place changes the flavor of the food. Anyone who has traveled through Europe can attest to the different flavors of the same food from one region to the next.

Now Georgians are beginning to have this experience here in Georgia. No passport needed. Dozens of local farmers markets are giving Georgians direct contact with the people who grow their food, and the flavors are remarkable.

However, even if you're lucky enough to live close to a farmers market, they are usually open only once a week, which means that most of your food will come from the local grocery store. But now, Georgians all over the state can buy a locally grown staple of every household. Beef!

Not just any beef. We're talking locally raised grass-fed beef that is free of growth hormones and is raised and processed in a certified humane facility. How can this be? Well, we have one pioneering man and one forward-looking company to thank — Will Harris and Whole Foods.

Will Harris owns White Oak Pastures in Bluffton, Ga., a farm that has been in his family's possession since 1866. Harris, his wife and three daughters live on the same land where the beef cattle roam. Harris took over the farm from his father, and he soon realized that the beef industry was not designed to help the local farmer.

"My grandfather always said that it's our job to take care of the land and the herd, and that if we do, they will



ered to be cutting-edge production innovations at the time we implemented them, but now we know better."

Realizing that he would not be able to hand down his farm to his daughters under the traditional industrialized food model, Harris went looking for a new way to develop his beef. Through input from organizations like Slow Food and Georgia Organics, he realized he could raise his beef on pasture and sell it to local consumers just like his ancestors did.

"As farmers, it's important to our livelihood to act as stewards of the land and reduce our carbon footprint," says Harris. "Choosing not to send our cattle away for processing is one way we can do that." Many beef produc-