

White Oak Pastures offers dining fresh from the field

Posted: Wednesday, May 28, 2014 6:00 am

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The chipotle steak wrap at White Oak Pastures.



The Southwest burger at White Oaks Pastures is served on a potato bun.



The quesadilla at White Oaks Pasture.



A vegetable plate at White Oaks Pastures.



The green tomato bruschetta was an appetizer on a recent Saturday night menu at White Oak Pastures.



A small garden is located just feet away from the kitchen at the dining pavilion at White Oak Pastures.



Mozzarella, pepper jack, and queso fresco all come on the cheese plate at White Oaks Pasture, along with grilled beef tongue.



The logo on the wall inside the dining pavilion at White Oak Pastures.

It would be hard for most restaurants to get any closer to the source of the food being prepared in the kitchen than what can be found at White Oak Pastures.

The Bluffton, Ga., restaurant is surrounded by the farm where the food being served was raised. You can literally step outside the open-air dining pavilion and see the herbs and vegetables growing just feet away, along with the grass-fed cows which will eventually become part of a tasty burger or steak wrap.



My wife and I spent a Saturday afternoon in southwest Georgia and ended up having lunch and dinner at the screened-in dining pavilion. We weren't sure what to expect, since this isn't a traditional restaurant.

The pavilion is actually for feeding the more than 80 farm workers who tend to the cows, chicken, sheep, field crops, and store, but it is also open to the public. During our lunch visit, there were more visitors at the pavilion than farm workers and when we returned that evening for dinner it was only visitors. And those visitors appeared to be from all over, from the license plates we saw, including Michigan, Florida, Alabama, and even one from Hawaii.

The lunch atmosphere was a bit different from dinner. We stood in line at lunch to place our order and then sat at one of the picnic tables with two retired teachers who had driven down from Edison, Ga., after hearing that the burgers there were supposedly the best around.

I had intended to try one of those burgers, but saw that they had chipotle steak wraps, which were not on the regular menu. I went with that and steak fries. A wise choice. Though it wasn't served at the speed of fast food, it was worth a little wait. Prepared fresh, the ingredients blended together for the perfect wrap, with tender beef, crunchy peppers, and just the right amount of chipotle sauce.

But I am getting ahead of myself. While waiting for the wrap, my wife and I shared a cheese plate, which came with homemade mozzarella, pepper jack, queso fresco ... and grilled beef tongue. I was all about the cheese (which was excellent), but the idea of sticking something in my mouth which spent its entire life inside of a cow's mouth was a little off putting ... until I smelled the tender, juicy, grilled meat. I wish I hadn't known it was tongue, because it was outstanding.

Our cheese plate also came with a small container of pickled vegetables, which my wife liked so much that she bought a jar at the farm's store before we left. It contained pickled turnips, carrots, radishes, onions and garlic, with red pepper flakes and two kinds of vinegar. A lady in the gift shop said it's only available in season.

And though beef is the name of the game at White Oak Pastures, you can still eat there, and eat well, without having any meat at all. My wife got a spicy cheese quesadilla with chipotle sauce in it, cheese and jalapenos. The tortillas were seared to a crispy golden brown and it had just enough heat.

We also had a four-layer cream cheese cake which was good, moderately moist and tasty, but not over the top sweet.

To be thorough, we decided to return that evening to see how they do Saturday night dinner on the farm. When we walked back into the pavilion, black table cloths and candles had been placed on all the picnic tables and orders were taken at the table, not after standing in line.

And just because the surroundings aren't fancy doesn't mean the menu isn't. Among the appetizers were grass-fed carpaccio and green tomato bruschetta. Main courses that night included offerings such as a grass-fed tenderloin filet topped with sherryed onions and blue goat cheese and a pastured lamb loin with goat cheese lamb demi. Not too shabby for a farm dining pavilion.

We started out with the green tomato bruschetta on toasted French bread with garlic, goat cheese, balsamic vinegar, olive oil, basil and what seemed to be fennel. The basil gave it a nice, sweet herbal flavor in contrast to the soft and tangy goat cheese and tart tomatoes. It was a nice,



light, fresh appetizer that didn't leave you so full you couldn't get through your entree.

Despite the special Saturday dinner offerings, I decided to order the Southwest burger from the regular menu, based on the ladies from Edison talking about the delicious burgers. Another wise choice. Served on a potato burger bun, it was topped with jalapenos, pepper "Jay" cheese, greens, and chipotle. It was all I could do to finish my meal, but I was determined not to let any of it go to waste. If not for cholesterol worries, I could eat burgers there every day. Seriously. The grass-fed beef has a different, very flavorful taste, not like what you'd experience with most ground beef.

As with lunch, my wife also found a meat-free meal to be had in the land of cows and chickens. She chose the organic roasted vegetables listed as a daily special side dish on the menu. It was Asian kale with sesame oil and lemon, and roasted turnips and carrots that were sweet and caramelized, but still had a firm bite to them.

Getting to White Oak Pastures isn't difficult. It's a few miles north of Blakely, Ga., on Highway 27. I'm already looking forward to our next trip over.

http://www.dothaneagle.com/lifestyles/restaurant_reviews/article_633422d0-e5d2-11e3-b066-0017a43b2370.html

