Spring Newsletter

Thanks to Our Customers

Welcome to the first-ever issue of the Dunhill Ranch newsletter.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the customers who have supported us in the last few years. Not only have you kept us supplied with alfalfa and dog food, but your comments and suggestions have helped us improve the quality of our lamb.

Our goal is to produce consistently superior lamb at a reasonable cost, without resorting to artificial growth boosters, or factory-like living conditions for the animals. Without customers like you, who care about where their food comes from, meeting this goal would be impossible.

A young Great Pyrenees pup learns about lambs

Why Grass-Fed Lamb?

What's the big deal? Don't all lambs eat grass? Sadly, this is not the case. Much of the lamb in stores is raised under what are called "intensive management conditions", also known as feedlots. While specific conditions vary from producer to producer, the goal is nearly always the same: raise the maximum pounds of lamb in the minimum amount of time. In pursuing this goal, producers often lose sight of what is much more important: making sure the lamb tastes good.

Lambs raised on processed feeds with little exercise will grow faster, but they will almost always have more fat on them, and fat is what produces the "mutton" taste that many people find unpleasant. In addition, lambs confined closely so that they can be fed efficiently need periodic doses of wormers and antibiotics in order to stay "healthy".

At Dunhill Ranch, we start with a simple premise: lambs get mother's milk, grass, or alfalfa to eat. Period. For the first 75 days after the lambs hit the ground, they live in spacious corrals with the ewes. Once they are large enough to keep up with the flock and can live on grass alone, they get to go out every day and graze virtually unlimited pastures. At night we keep all the animals in the corrals because the hills are alive with the sound of coyotes.

So does buying grass-fed lamb really matter? You bet it does- you can taste the difference.

Dogs, Dogs, Everywhere

Many visitors to the ranch stop to gaze at the sheep in the fields, and are very surprised when one of those "sheep" starts barking to warn them to stay away from the flock.

What the visitors are seeing (and hearing) are our Great Pyrenees dogs who go out every day with the flock. We raise and train them for a deceptively simple job: keep the sheep together and protect them from predators. We also teach them to be wary of strangers, but affectionate once properly introduced.

It takes three years for a Pyr to complete the training and graduate to field work, but it is time well spent: we have lost no lambs to predators in the last three years, even though we see coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions almost every day.

Red Lamb Stew

Serves 4 to 6

This recipe comes from Madur Jaffrey's book *Indian Cooking.* In India it is called Rogan Josh. It's spicy (though you easily adjust this) and very tasty. We like it a lot, so if you make it, be sure to invite us over!

Ingredients

2 one-inch cubes fresh ginger, peeled & coarsely-chopped

8 cloves garlic, peeled

4 Tbs + 1 ¼ cups water

10 Tbs vegetable oil

2 lbs boned lamb from the shoulder or leg, trimmed of fat, cut into 1-inch cubes

Spice Mix #1:

 10 cardamom pods
 2 bay leaves
 6 cloves
 10 peppercorns
 1-inch piece of cinnamon stick

1 cup yellow onion, peeled & finely chopped

Spice Mix #2:

 1 tsp ground coriander
 2 tsp ground cumin
 4 tsp paprika
 ¼ to 1 tsp cayenne pepper
  (depending on how spicy you like it)
 1 ¼ tsp salt

6 Tbs plain yogurt

¼ tsp garam masala (see below)

Freshly-ground black pepper

Technique

Put the ginger, garlic, and 4 Tbs of water into a blender. Blend until smooth.

Heat the oil in a wide, heavy pot over medium high heat. Brown the lamb in several batches and set aside. Put Spice Mix #1 in the oil. Stir once and wait until the cloves swell and the bay leaves begin to take on color. This takes just a few seconds.

Put in the onions. Stir and fry for 5 minutes or until the onions turn medium brown. Put in the ginger-garlic paste and stir for 30 seconds. Then add Spice Mix #2 and fry for another 30 seconds. Add the lamb and any accumulated juices. Stir for another 30 seconds. Add the yogurt a tablespoon at a time, stirring each bit until completely blended into the sauce.

Add 1 ¼ cup water to the pot and bring the contents to a boil, scraping all the browned bits from the sides and bottom. Cover, turn the heat to low, and simmer for 1 hour or until lamb is tender. Every 10 minutes or so, give the pot a good stir.

When the lamb is tender, take off the lid, turn the heat up, and boil away some of the liquid. You should end up with a thick, reddish-brown sauce. Spoon off any fat, sprinkle garam masala and black pepper over the meat and mix them in a little.

This dish goes well over rice or with a green bean side dish and some bread.

Garam Masala

This aromatic spice mixture is very common in Indian cooking and can often be found in stores. Use it sparingly at the end of cooking, almost as a garnish. This recipe makes about 3 tablespoons.

1 Tbs cardamom seeds
2-inch piece of cinnamon stick
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp cloves
1 tsp black peppercorns
¼ of an average size nutmeg

If you are lucky and you have all these ingredients pre-ground, just put them in a small jar and mix well. Otherwise, grind them finely in a spice or coffee grinder, or with a mortar and pestle.
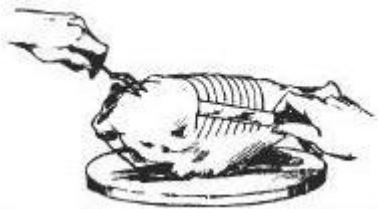
Carving a Leg of Lamb

A roast leg of lamb can be the centerpiece of a memorable feast. But how to turn that beautiful, dark-brown roast into a dish fit for a king? Unless, like a feudal lord you gnaw the meat right off the bone, you may find the following illustrations helpful…
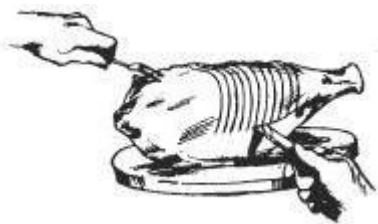
Choose a carving knife that is 8 to 10 inches long, and get it as sharp as you can. Place the leg on a platter with the shank facing away from you. Cut one or two slices from the underside of the leg where the meat is closer to the bone. This forms a base on which to stabilize the roast.

Turn the leg up on the base and, starting at the shank end, make thin vertical slices. Use long, firm strokes and avoid sawing at the meat. In this way you will be cutting across the grain of the meat, which will produce more tender portions.

After reaching the aitchbone (rump bone), free the slices by cutting under them along the top of the leg bone.

You can then carve similarly from the other side, though the slices will be much smaller. You may also find it necessary to grasp the leg by the shank bone using a napkin or kitchen towel. Carve only what is necessary; meat left on the bone stays moist and firm for later carving.

Pour any juices that accumulate on the platter over the carved portions or mix it into your favorite gravy.

Do You Have a Favorite Recipe?

For some time now, we have been collecting our favorite lamb recipes and sharing them with our customers. If you have a recipe that you think beats all the rest, or you are looking for ideas for your next dinner, we want to hear from you! Contact Pete Ditmars or Jessica Aberly via phone, e-mail, or snail-mail.

Dunhill Ranch
P.O. Box 1155
Magdalena, NM 87825

575-854-2847
DunhillRanch@hughes.net

Prices for 2008

It is probably no surprise to you that things are getting more expensive every year. Since we started selling our lambs in 2003 the costs of diesel for our truck and alfalfa for our nursing ewes have more than doubled.

This year, we are happy to announce that the ranch pick-up price of our lambs is unchanged at $1.45/lb.

Unfortunately, our local processor has raised his prices, and we must raise our rates in turn to cover the increased costs of processing and transport. Accordingly, the pick-up at the processor price is increasing to $2.35/lb.

The delivery charge to Socorro is unchanged at $25, but the cost to deliver to Albuquerque is rising to $45 and delivery to Santa Fe will now cost $65. As always, multiple deliveries to either Albuquerque or Santa Fe will incur only a single delivery charge.