Newsletter – Spring 2013

Lamb R.S.V.P.

Well, the wind is howling, the air is full of dirt, and overnight we went from 20 degrees to 75. Must be spring in New Mexico. Let me just double-check… excellent… the lambs haven't been blown away by the wind yet. Most of our topsoil however….

We are still in grassland conservation mode this year. The rains last fall did wonders for our pastures, but the grass is still not where we want it to be (see next article). So, once again, we are going to be raising a reduced number of lambs.

A (rare) calm spring day

Also, this year, for the first time, we regret that we may have to limit how much lamb you can order, so that all our customers can get some. In particular, it is probable that we will not be able to allocate more than one lamb to each person. In any case, please make your reservations for lamb as soon as possible as we will sell out very quickly. As always, we will maintain a waiting list, but please don't delay and risk missing out on the best tasting lamb you can buy. Reserving lamb does not require a deposit. Barring any

gigantic increase in our cost of processing (which is highly unlikely) our prices will remain unchanged from last year. Information on all our products and prices can be found here.

You can e-mail your reservations to sales@dunhillranch.com or call us at 575-854-2847. Please remember to include your phone number in your e-mail so we can call you when your lamb becomes available.

Range Management at Dunhill Ranch

"Your ranch is a thousand acres? And you graze another 1200 acres of neighboring land? Wow! Why don't you raise more sheep?" This is a question that we often hear when people see that our sheep flock is quite small compared to the size of our ranch. We could easily quadruple the size of our flock and sell many more lambs, so why don't we do it?

The answer is that we see ourselves as stewards of the land and guardians of the sheep, as well as ranchers trying to earn a living. The order of these roles is critical to us: without healthy land, the sheep won't be healthy, and without healthy sheep, we won't be ranchers for long. So, the answer to why we don't raise more sheep has to do, in the end, with the long-term health of the land.

Western rangeland is surprisingly variable. There are dozens of different types of grasses, forbs, and shrubs on Dunhill Ranch. Some areas of the ranch are rolling hills, with thick carpets of grass with a sprinkling of wildflowers, other areas are naked rock with only the hardiest of grasses and shrubs living in the crevices, and still other areas

Bobotie

Pronounced *ba-boor-tea*, this dish is a South African classic. Derived from similar Indonesian dishes, recipes for bobotie can be found dating back to the beginning of the 17th century.

As with most dishes that have survived the test of time, there are a million variations on the basic theme which is sautéed meat and fruit flavored with pungent spices and bound together in an egg and cream custard.

This particular recipe is adapted from one published by Ina Paarman many years ago and is absolutely delicious. Expect no leftovers. Many thanks for J. Lionne for the pointer to this dish. Serves 6.

Ingredients

2 Tbs vegetable oil
½ Tbs butter
1 pound lean ground lamb
2 cups chopped onion
2 cloves garlic, crushed and minced
1 cup grated apple

2 tsp curry powder
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp dried fines herbes (mixed parsley, chives, tarragon, and chervil)
1 tsp turmeric
½ tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp sugar
¼ tsp cayenne

1 tsp salt
¼ tsp ground black pepper
1 Tbs white wine vinegar
2 slices of white bread, soaked in water, lightly squeezed, and mashed
2 bay leaves

½ cup sour cream or yoghurt
½ cup whipping cream
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp black pepper
2 eggs

Technique

1. Stir-fry the lamb in the oil and butter until loose and crumbly. Add the chopped onion and fry until limp and glazed. Add the garlic, grated apple, and spices (up to and including the cayenne). Continue cooking for 1-2 minutes, stirring to mingle flavors.

2. Season with salt, pepper, and wine vinegar to taste. Add softened, mashed bread slices.

3. Spread the mix into a flat oven-proof dish. Tuck the bay leaves into the mixture.

4. Beat the remaining ingredients together in a bowl with a fork. Pour the topping over the lamb and spread evenly.

5. Bake uncovered for 35 minutes at 375°F, or until the topping is firm and golden brown.

6. Serve with yellow rice, chutney, and a mix of diced onions and fresh tomatoes.

Lamejun

A long time ago, in a place far, far, from New Mexico, I stopped for a quick bite at an Armenian bakery. There, I had a pizza that was memorable enough for me to attempt to recreate it 30 years later. Here's my best shot; you will not be disappointed. Serves 6.

Ingredients – For the Crust

3 tsp yeast
¼ tsp sugar
1¼ cups warm water
¼ cup vegetable oil, plus a bit extra
½ tsp salt
3¼ cups white flour, plus a bit extra

Ingredients – For the Topping

1 lb ground lamb
2 cups onion, minced
1 cup red bell pepper, minced
3 Tbs tomato paste
½ cup diced tomatoes (fresh or canned)
1 tsp minced garlic
1 tsp ground allspice
½ tsp smoked paprika
    (sweet paprika is ok, if that's all you have)
¼-½ tsp cayenne pepper
Salt and ground black pepper
6 Tbs fresh parsley, chopped
6 oz crumbled feta cheese

Lamejun - Continued

Technique

1. Combine the yeast, sugar, salt, oil, and water in jar and shake vigorously.

2. Put the flour in a medium bowl and then blend in the liquid with a spoon. If it seems a bit dry, add a bit more water before kneading.

3. Transfer the dough to a work surface. Coat your hands with some oil and knead the dough (100 strokes or so) until it is smooth and elastic, adding just enough flour to prevent sticking.

4. Clean the bowl and oil it. Place the dough in the bowl and cover with plastic wrap or a vaguely damp towel. Place in a warm location and allow to rise until doubled (about 1 hour).

5. Meanwhile, place the lamb, onions, diced peppers, tomatoes, tomato paste, garlic, spices, and salt in another bowl and mix well.

6. After the dough has risen, divide into 6 equal pieces and place on a floured surface. Using a floured rolling pin, roll out each ball of dough into a circle about 6-8 inches across.

7. Preheat the oven to 450°F and lightly oil two large baking sheets. Put the dough circles on the baking sheets, leaving some room in-between them.

8. Divide the topping into six portions, and spread one portion across each dough circle. Sprinkle the parsley and feta cheese over the topping. Bake until the crust is crisp and the topping is browned about 15 minutes.

Roasted Lamb Ribs

Ribs are undoubtedly the hardest part of the lamb to cook. The combination of above average fat and relatively tough meat produces a real cooking challenge.

This recipe was nicked from [The Blue Kitchen](#) blog. It works well with Dunhill Ranch lamb. Serves 3-4.

Ingredients

2 large cloves garlic, unpeeled
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and chopped
1 carrot, peeled and chopped
2-3 pounds lamb ribs

2 bay leaves (or one really big one)
1 tsp salt

1 large garlic clove, peeled and minced
1 Tbs dried rosemary
1 tsp caraway seeds
½ tsp black pepper
½ tsp salt
2-3 Tbs olive oil

Technique

1. Take two garlic cloves and mash them with a chef's knife to break them open good. Place them along with the onion, carrot and ribs in a into a lidded stock pot or pan large enough to hold them easily Cover with water.

2. Add bay leaves and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a slow simmer and skim off any scum that rises to the surface during the first few minutes of cooking. Cover and simmer for about an hour.

3. Transfer ribs to a plate. Feed the remaining solids and cooking liquid to your dog (once it has cooled down) and watch how fast it disappears. Ribs can be made ahead up to this point and refrigerated before roasting.

4. Preheat the oven to 350ºF. Put the remaining ingredients (except the oil) in a spice grinder or mortar. Grind all the spices finely. Then add enough olive oil to make a moderately thick paste.

5. Place ribs on a rack on a lightly oiled roasting pan. Brush the ribs on both sides with the spice mix and place in oven. Roast ribs until nicely browned, about 1 hour, turning once at 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let them rest for about 5 minutes. Slice into individual ribs and serve.

Range Management at Dunhill Ranch – Contd.

are clay flats-- barren or weedy most of the time, but lush with sunflowers and legumes after strong summer rains.

This corral at Dunhill Ranch, usually bare earth, was filled with sunflowers after heavy rains

The land is also very fragile, and small changes can have large consequences over time: tire tracks from a single vehicle trip across a field will flatten plants, stunt their growth and remain visible for years; multiple trips can result in the formation of arroyos from erosion; a reduction in the number of predators may allow rodent populations to explode with devastating consequences for the grasses; grazing animals in one place for too long will allow undesirable plants to flourish; the periodic (lately, perennial) failure of the July monsoon can result in a whole year's growth being lost; and, as we found out two years ago, drought combined with a week-long negative 20 degree freeze can kill off a good half of the grass in one year.

So how do you manage this variable, fragile land? Traditionally, folks around here have relied on government estimates (some of which date back to 1907) that indicate a certain area of land can support, say, 5 Animal Units per square mile. What's an Animal Unit? Well, depending on who you ask, it can be a cow (how big?), a cow/calf pair (how long does the calf hang around?), or anywhere from 5 to 8 sheep (how big? with or without lambs?). Armed with one of these numbers, many ranchers count their

square mileage, multiply by X Animal Units, drop that many animals on the land, and leave them until they have eaten all the grass. After all, the grass will grow back when it rains, won't it? The results of such a management strategy are clearly visible in the picture below.

Left of fence– "Traditional" range management
Right side – Dunhill Ranch

We believe that estimates of the land's animal carrying capacity need to be made constantly. Thus, we favor using targeted grazing. Our ideal pasture, after grazing by our flock, is one in which one half of the plants are flourishing and putting out seeds, the other half of the plants are grazed down to 1-2 inches, and there are a sprinkling of plants that are heavy with dead stalks from past years. This leaves enough forage and cover for wild animals (we have a resident herd of antelope who also depends on the grass to survive) and plenty of seeds to start new plants. Using shepherds, dogs, and horses, we move the sheep from area to area and keep them from overgrazing areas that are less than ideal. When good grazing areas are few and far between, we feed the sheep stored grass and hay.

We also strictly limit our vehicular travel to established roads. We use horses whenever we can, but often we just walk. There are several old roads on our ranch that we have closed and that, over the years, have reverted to their natural state.

Thirdly, we let predators share the land with us, except in cases of extreme inconvenience

(think a rattlesnake among the hay bales). Predators are required to maintain natural balance among smaller animals. Currently, our biggest land management challenge is an explosion in the population of Kangaroo Rats. NMSU range scientists have told us that K-Rats naturally experience boom/bust population cycles, but they are very destructive when they are booming. They can throw up a 2 foot tall dirt mound and denude the ground in a 10 yard circle within a week. They will strip all the seeds from grasses in a large area and make it very hard for new plants to sprout. They tunnel extensively and can turn large areas of soil into something resembling Swiss cheese. Once the soil is loose and barren, it is fertile ground for invasive weeds. For all of these reasons, any predator that fancies K-Rats for dinner is welcome on our ranch. Coyotes, bobcats, snakes, owls, hawks- come one come all! We are currently experimenting with increasing the native population of gopher snakes in order to limit the damage caused by the K-Rats. We believe that K-Rats serve a purpose on the ranch, but there are just too darn many of them right now.

Typical pasture damage caused by Kangaroo Rats

Finally, we try to manage the land looking at least a year ahead. That valley looks fine now, but what happens if (when) the July monsoon fails? How will we feed all these sheep next winter? Do we need to leave extra grass this year to allow for above-average rodent populations? These are the kind of thoughts that tend to keep our flock

size small.

Targeted grazing with sheep

Some people think we are being over-cautious and ignoring the profits that could be made from a larger flock. They may be right. But we have been doing this for quite a few years now, and have seen how rapidly the land can change. We've seen the damage traditional range management can do to the land when the summer rains fail. We want leave the land with enough resilience to survive the next drought which is always just around the corner.

A Sheep Joke for Ewe

A man walks up to a sheep farmer and says, "If I tell you exactly how many sheep are in your flock, can I take one?" The farmer looks at his large flock of sheep, snickers, and says, "Sure."

After a long look the man says, "5,279." The farmer, startled, says, "How did you do that?"

The man says, "I'd rather not say. Can I have my animal?" "I guess so," says the farmer. The man picks up an animal and starts to walk off.

"Wait!" yells the farmer. "If I can guess where you're from, will you give me my animal back?" The man snickers, and says, "Sure."

"You must be from Albuquerque," says the farmer immediately. The man, startled, says, "How did you know that?"

The farmer says, "I'd rather not say. Can I have my sheepdog back?"

More fun for ewe: Find the sheepdog in the picture above
Hint – he's got a long tail.