

## Newsletter – Winter 2011

### It's Snowing Lambs!!

As the New Mexicans among you know, it was really cold and snowy this February. We had just started the lambing season with 6 sets of twins when the temperature started to drop. Then the snow came so thick and fast you could hardly see the sheep through it. Eventually the snow eased off and we thought we were over the worst of it when the



You call this cold? I call it a sunny day!

temperature dropped to 25 degrees below zero and the real struggle started. All the water systems froze up, the truck stopped running and working outside was only possible in very short sessions. Fortunately, the ewes seemed to think that it was too cold to have lambs, and they kindly waited until the thermometer had reached at least 10° F. After several days of frozen fingers and feet, we got everything more or less back to normal and then the lambs really started popping out. As we go to press (figuratively speaking) we have almost finished lambing and have 50 lambs on the ground. This is quite a few less than our normal lamb crop, since we were forced to reduce the size of our flock last year, but they are all active and healthy.

### Looming Lamb Shortage

One of the guiding principles at Dunhill Ranch is that we are raising lambs with respect for the lambs AND for the land: we are committed to raising only as many lambs as the land can support long-term.

In the past two summers, we have received very little rain at our ranch and consequently the grass has not grown as much as usual. Last fall we were forced to cut back on the number of ewes that we kept over the winter in order that the grass should get a chance to recover in 2011.

Thus, it is even more important than ever to reserve your lamb ahead of time! We will only have about 50 lambs for sale in 2011 and some of those will be reserved for USDA-inspected retail meat sales. Since we have already received reservations for 25 lambs, we expect to sell out long before autumn.

Reserving your lamb (or individual lamb packages) costs you nothing; just send us an e-mail or call us and let us know what you want to reserve and when you would like to get it. Please remember to include your phone number so we can call you when your lamb becomes available.

### Your Processor – Ray Chavez

When you buy a lamb from Dunhill Ranch, you can be sure that you are getting a lamb that was raised naturally and that contains no harmful additives. What you may not realize, and what is equally important, is that your lamb is processed correctly so that you get the best quality meat for your money.

Up until four years ago, we used a number of

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## Moussaka

This is a classic dish in the Greek style from [The Essential Mediterranean Cookbook](#). If you don't happen to have any ground lamb on hand, you can also mince some lamb shoulder meat instead. Just chop it really fine leaving the fat in. If you want to spice things up a bit, add a little bit of cayenne pepper to the filling and dream of seeing the islands of the Aegean from your kitchen window!

Prep time: 20 minutes + 30 minutes standing  
Total cooking time: 2 hrs

Makes 6 servings

### Ingredients – For the Filling

3 lbs eggplant, cut into ¼ in. slices  
½ cup olive oil  
2 onions, finely chopped  
2 large cloves garlic, crushed  
½ tsp ground allspice  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
1½ lb ground lamb  
2 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
2 Tbs tomato paste  
½ cup white wine  
3 Tbs chopped fresh flat leaf parsley

### Ingredients – For the Cheese Sauce

4 Tbs (2 oz.) butter  
½ cup plain flour  
2½ cups milk  
Pinch of ground nutmeg  
1/3 cup finely grated Parmesan  
2 eggs, lightly beaten

### Technique

1. Lay the eggplant on a tray, sprinkle with salt and leave to stand for 30 minutes. Rinse under water and pat dry.
2. Heat 2 Tbs olive oil in a frying pan, add eggplant in batches and cook 1-2 minutes each side, or until golden and soft. Add more oil when needed.
3. Heat 1 Tbs olive oil in large saucepan, add onion and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes. Add garlic, allspice and cinnamon and cook for 30 seconds. Add ground lamb and cook for 5 minutes, or until browned,

breaking up any lumps. Add the tomato, tomato paste and wine, and simmer over low heat for 30 minutes, or until the liquid had evaporated. Stir in the chopped parsley and season to taste.

4. For the cheese sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan over low heat. Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute, or until pale and foaming. Remove the saucepan from the heat and gradually stir in the milk and nutmeg. Return the saucepan to the heat and stir constantly until the sauce boils and thickens. Reduce the heat and simmer for 2 minutes. Stir in 1 Tbs of the cheese until well combined. Stir in the eggs just before using.

5. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line the base of a 10 x 12 in. ovenproof dish with a third of the eggplant. Spoon half the meat sauce over it and cover with another layer of eggplant. Spoon the remaining meat sauce over the top and cover with the remaining eggplant. Spread the cheese sauce over the top and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake for 1 hour. let stand for 10 min. before slicing.

NOTE: You can substitute an equal quantity of sliced, shallow-fried zucchini or potatoes, or any combination, for the eggplant.

## Grilled Lamb Leg Steaks

### Ingredients

4 lamb leg steaks, 1" thick, about 3 pounds  
2 cups pomegranate juice  
¼ cup olive oil  
1 tsp salt  
¾ tsp ground black pepper  
2 bay leaves, crumbled  
1 tsp dried thyme  
2 cloves garlic, peeled, crushed, chopped.

### Technique

1. Place all the ingredients in a large Ziploc bag and mix thoroughly. Refrigerate all day, turning occasionally.
2. Grill over a hot charcoal fire 3-5 minutes per side (depending on the heat of the fire and desired level of doneness). Serve with fire roasted vegetables and rice.

*Thanks to E. Bodio for the recipe!*

different meat processors from the local area with mixed results. Then we decided to follow a friend's recommendation and work with Ray Chavez Meat Processing in Jarales. What a difference it has made to the quality of our lamb products!

The first thing you notice when you arrive at Ray's processing shop is that it is right in back of his home. The second thing you notice is that it's really, really clean. That's one of the things Ray insists on: "Keep it clean as you go along and you avoid all sorts of problems."

When you first meet Ray, you get an instant sense that this is a guy who works really hard. Ray credits his family with instilling this work ethic into him: "I learned that to get ahead, you have to work hard- get the job done, done right."



Ray's family has been farming in the Rio Grande valley for many generations. His father raised cattle and butchered them himself, and gave Ray his first lessons in meat processing. When he was 17, Ray started working with Johnny Cordova, who owned a local butcher shop. In fact, Ray initially worked without pay, because he wanted to learn the business from someone who maintained high standards of quality.

After his apprenticeship with Cordova, Ray became a butcher and meat market manager for two supermarkets, Safeway and Furrs, where he worked for almost thirty years. When Furrs decided to close its retail stores in New Mexico, Ray opened his own business.

When asked about the stress of running his own business and the long hours that he has to put in, Ray replied, "It's easy for me. Processing meat has always come naturally to me and it never feels like work. I love to get up early in the morning and get started. Every day is a fun day."

The work is natural and fun for Ray, but keeping track of all of the orders that he has to handle each day also calls for a great deal of organization. Careful scheduling is critical to the business, Ray maintains. He says that lot of butchers get into trouble by trying to process too many animals. "Giving the customer the best possible service is key. If you get too many animals, too many people working at the same time, you start making mistakes."

Ray carefully controls the number of processing times that are available to his customers and, since he is known up and down the valley for the quality of his work, he is usually booked up for weeks or months in advance. He employs only two assistants, and this ensures that each and every order gets Ray's personal attention. At Dunhill Ranch, we have had to adapt our production and delivery schedule to work with Ray's schedule; we usually pre-book all our processing dates for the autumn before the end of the summer. We bring the lambs in larger groups of similarly sized lambs, so that Ray can focus on our lambs for a whole processing session. It's a little more complicated this way, but the results are worth it.

Ray is quick to point out that he couldn't achieve these great results alone. He credits much of the success of his business to his assistant, Ray Benevidez, with whom he has worked for 9 years. He also gives a lot of credit to his wife Anna to whom he has been married for 32 years: "If it wasn't for her help and understanding, I wouldn't be able to do all this."

At Dunhill Ranch, we depend on customers who are interested in supporting local agriculture. We are proud that we, in turn, can help support Ray Chavez Meat Processing.

## Going Back in Time...

Have you ever wished that you had a time machine, so that you could see how people lived long ago? Making this wish come true is as easy as piling another lamb chop on your plate!

It turns out that sheep were one of the first animals to be domesticated, after dogs. While sheep won't ever be known as man's best friend, they were (and still are) one of the most efficient converters of inedible (to humans) grasses to delicious and nutritious meat. They were probably the first domesticated food source, followed closely by goats. Those early humans obviously knew a good thing when they saw (and tasted) one!

Scientists are not exactly sure where and when the first sheep were domesticated by humans, but most seem to agree that it happened in the area of the Middle East now known as Iran and Iraq, about 10,000 years ago. Sheep are now raised all across the globe.

The trouble in pinpointing the exact time and place of domestication seems to be deciding whether the people in some of the older settlements were just hunting wild herds of sheep or were actually raising and breeding flocks of their own. Scientists have been able to pinpoint the sex and age of sheep bones found near human settlements and, in some cases, the distribution of ages matches what one would expect to see in a domesticated flock.

Early shepherds would want to keep the best breeding females and some of the lambs for future consumption. Therefore, the first to turn into chops would be the young males. It is probable that only a very few males would be kept for breeding purposes, a practice that is still followed here at Dunhill Ranch. No one wants to be overrun by teenage rams!

Once these early humans figured out how to keep domesticated food animals, they no longer needed to depend on hunting for meat. Even without freezers and refrigerators, domestic sheep would have

been a dependable source of high quality protein, which could be obtained just by walking out to the pasture. This ease of access undoubtedly made permanent settlements based on agriculture more attractive. Along with the meat, we have learned that every part of the sheep was used: leather and wool for clothing, horn and bone for various tools, and fat for tallow. Sheep manure also provided a good source of fertilizer for growing crops.

Today, ingredients derived from sheep continue to be used in all sorts of products including asphalt binder, tennis balls, insulation, explosives, antifreeze, chewing gum, cosmetics, candles, piano hammers and, of course, yarn. Sheep bones are also processed to extract gelatin, create adhesives, and even supply the collagen and bone used in plastic surgery.

So, the next time you dig into a tasty lamb roast, remember that you are also taking a step back in time!

## Dunhill Ranch Holds the Line on Prices

The talk everywhere is about food price inflation. Disasters in Russia, drought in China, and a poor American corn harvest seem to indicate that everything you can eat will cost a lot more soon.

At Dunhill Ranch, we are happy to announce that our 2011 prices for whole and half lambs will remain unchanged at \$1.65 per live-weight pound. Our prices for USDA-inspected retail packages of lamb will also remain the same.

The only prices that may have to increase are the prices for processing (currently \$1.30/lb, for custom processing, or \$25/lamb if you do it at the ranch) and delivery (cost varies with destination). We will reset these prices towards the end of the summer, when we know what our cost will be. We hope that we will not have to increase these prices, but as our cost for processing and delivery increases, we need to pass the increase on: we make no profit from processing or delivery of lambs.