

Partner Newsletter

Consumers of Petite Beef by Headwater Farms: Partners in the process of change.

FEATURE ON HEALTH What are “CLAs” and why are they important?

Jane Shaw, USDA Agriculture Research Service in Beaver, WV.

Headwater Farms Petite Beef has great taste, but can it also have good fat? Will it harden our arteries like industrial beef or help us to avoid cancer?

It can be difficult to keep track of all the new studies and ideas on fat that come out and the real answer is much more complicated than any one catchy phrase. Scientists and nutritionists often revise their opinions about the kinds and quantities of meats and fats we should eat and with good reason. Understand-

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Spotlight – The Woodson Farm Peter Maille, Cacapon Institute

As the South Branch winds its way to the Potomac it’s sinuous oxbows begin near Springfield, not far from the Woodson Farm—a showcase for rotational grazing.

Bob Woodson is a third generation farmer who, with his wife Myrna, manages 800 acres from the brick rancher they built themselves in the 1970s. Just this past year Bob has moved from two traditional pastures of 100 acres each to 16 paddocks separated only by an inexpensive single strand of electric wire. While such a fence won’t deter deer, “you can’t *drive* cattle through it” says Bob. Not only that but where once he was

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Bob and Myrna Woodson

Cattle rumble into fresh pasture on the Woodson Farm

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Remember, Petite Beef by Headwater Farms is unique because it’s:

- * locally produced on family farms and sold directly to you—revenue goes to the farmers,
- * raised without adding antibiotics or hormones, and
- * raised on pasture, naturally leaner, and produced in an environmentally friendly manner.

Headwater Farms

The Headwater Farms, L.L.C.

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www.headwaterfarms.com

John Arnold III

(The Arnold Farm)

Charles Bonar & Sam Hannah

(Fort Hill Farm)

Sue & Bob Cheves

(Swinging Bridge Farm)

John & Kelley Hicks

(Seven Mile Hickory Farm)

Garrett & Michelle Kuykendall Jr.

(Riverview Farm)

Roy & Jeanne Milleson

(Milleson's Stock Farm)

Tom & Christy Stump

(Chimney Hill Farm)

Bob & Myrna Woodson

(The Woodson Farm)

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ing how beef supplies our bodies with energy and nutrients is complex but when we look at the kind of beef we are eating we start to understand a lot about what might, at first, seem contradictory. We're not the only ones who are what we eat. It goes for cattle too and when it comes to healthy fats in your cut of beef, a stress free diet of living plants can make all the difference. A lot of data are beginning to show up that tell us just how healthy pasture-finished beef is. Most of it centers around two kinds of fats-omega-3 fatty acids and CLA (conjugated linoleic acid).

Omega-3s are essential for human growth and development and we depend on food sources for them. Adequate levels of omega-3s can mean lower risks of high blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms, heart attacks and strokes, depression, attention-deficit disorder, aggressive behavior, dementia, schizophrenia and possibly cancer. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in the leaves of green plants and are stored directly in animal tissue, but they don't last long. As soon as an animal is no longer eating living green plants, omega-3s decrease.

To make matters worse, when an animal is switched to an industrial feedlot diet, the higher levels of omega-6 fatty acids in plant seeds such as corn increase the levels of these 'bad' fats in grain-fed beef. Omega-6s are associated with cancer, diabetes, obesity, arthritis and asthma.

And how does Petite Beef that is pasture raised and finished on pasture and hay with a grain supplement figure in this?—We are working with the Petite Beef Project this year to find out. I think that the bottom line is that the closer to fresh grass you are the better.

CLA has been in the headlines lately for two reasons: it lowers your

risk of cancer as well as inhibiting tumor growth and it converts fat into muscle. A tough combination to beat! Despite attempts to manufacture supplements for people and to formulate 'scientific' diets for beef cattle in order to increase CLA levels, no one has been able to come close to the naturally high CLA levels in beef raised on fresh grass. When you stop and think about it, it all makes sense; after all a cow is a ruminant with four stomachs designed by nature to breakdown and digest cellulose and fibrous material, not the fatty corn and grain diets of chickens or pigs. But the story doesn't end here. There is a whole complex of fats: unsaturated, saturated, 18-carbon chain and other that are affected by an animal's diet. Their interactions and biological pathways are changeable. One aspect that has recently been discovered is that there are up to 3 times the amount of transvaccenic acid, a precursor to the production of CLA, in a grass-fed cow's milk. And our bodies are capable of converting that TVA into CLA.

When you consider all this and the fact that naturally lean grass-fed meat has higher levels of beta-carotene and vitamin A and lower incidences of *E. coli*, the choice isn't too hard to make. It seems like the best advice to give these days is to eat the way nature intended --pasture-fed.

For more information you can check:

- ? www.eatwild.com
- ? "Why Grassfed is Best" by Jo Robinson
- ? "Conjugated Linoleic Acids—An Opportunity for Pasture-based Dairy Farms?" By J.H. Herbein, J.J. Loor, and W.A. Wark.
- ? "Conjugated linoleic acid content of milk from cows fed different diets" in Journal of Dairy Science 82(10) 2146-56 by T.R. Dhiman et al.

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chasing his cattle all over expansive pastures, all he has to do now is show up and his cattle come running. I watched him open a “gate” and stand back as 40 or 50 cattle ambled through to the next pasture (picture page 1). And where multiflora rose and wild olive trees once choked fence lines, Bob’s fence lines seem unlikely to suffer the same fate—the electric wire is placed high enough for the cattle to graze underneath them and thus keep them clear.

With financial support from the drought relief effort of 1999, Bob installed wells and laid approximately 2 miles of water line. With this line he supplies water to his paddocks. The lines feed watering troughs made of large tires. Tires being black, they don’t freeze as quickly as other troughs, and being tires, they don’t fracture when they do freeze.

These 200 acres border the South Branch River. With his paddocks and water delivery system, cattle have access to this river frontage only during closely monitored flash grazing forays. Grazing the 200 acres more uniformly also allows for a healthier pasture. Healthier pastures are better able to keep nutrients and sediment in the pasture where they can do some good rather than in the river where they can harm water quality.

And does all this matter? Absolutely. Bob has seen his efforts bear fruit. He can attest to more grass growing in his pastures, greener stream banks, and his cattle are easier to manage. Our hope is that his work will be equally well rewarded in the marketplace.

Slide show depicts “The Story of Headwater Farms”

It started out as a power point presentation for people at the Sustainability Fair 2001 in Weston. After the fair and some digital manipulation, it became a web-based slideshow. The images show beautiful landscapes, people, and communities at work. Viewable at www.cacaponinstitute.org, please check it out and let us know how you enjoyed it. And of course, feel free to invite potential customers as well.

Riparian Grazing Protocol Accepted

Our last Newsletter reported that the HF partnership had begun to develop a set of farm management protocols. We are happy to announce that the USDA NRCS has formally accepted the protocols we proposed as a demonstration project. The cornerstone of the agreement between the NRCS and the HF partnership can be found in our addition to the NRCS Prescribed Grazing Conservation Practices Standard:

The riparian area is not to be managed as other areas on the farm; it is never to be used as a concentrated livestock feeding area nor grazed during wet periods when stream banks are likely to break down and erode. This area is to be managed to preserve its function as a buffer between the stream and animal wastes and other potential pollutants.

Accepting this as a central tenant of HF buffer zone management opened the door for the NRCS to allow for additional flexibility in some other provisions. For example, where the original guidelines stated “The grazing season will extend from May – October” the current version says that riparian areas can be grazed “year-round so long as this area is not grazed during wet periods when stream banks are likely to break down and erode.” In addition, the original guidelines called for buffer strips fifty feet wide. The demonstration guidelines are able to eliminate this because once again, “the area is to be managed to preserve its function as a buffer between the stream and animal wastes...”

This is the kind of flexibility that allows farmers to bring their profound knowledge of the landscape to bear and come up with “common-sense” solutions.

Farming in the Highlands 2001-2002

Bob Cheves, WVU Extension

2001 was a reasonably good year for farmers in the Highlands. Summer rain was good and the cattle prices, while lower than last year, are still on the upside of the general 10-year price cycle for cattle. Right now 2002 is a bit worrisome in that our rainfall stopped in August. This practically eliminated the fall pasture growth that farmers depend on. As a result they will have to do a lot more feeding than normal. For next year we are keeping our fingers crossed hoping for better rain.

On the national level, the farm bill in Congress is of interest to both the farms and conservation groups. The previous 7-year bill, was commodity price support driven, expires soon. In Congress the traditional advocacy for that kind of bill remains strong but it appears to be tempered this time by a conservation-driven section. This section would supplement farmers’ incomes for implementing conservation practices. This would mean that a number of small farmers not traditionally receiving help — a majority of Potomac Highlands farmers — would now be eligible to improve their land with regard to conservation.

Meet Michelle Kuykendall

Michelle is the wife of HF member Garrett Kuykendall (pronounced Kur-ken-doll). She didn't intend to marry a farmer but that's what happened! Now she has found a place in the HF organization as their first official employee. As such she may well be the voice on the other end of the line on your next call so say "hi." She looks forward to helping fill orders, maintain records, monitor the marketing effort, and who knows what else.

Welcome aboard Michelle!



Michelle, daughter Chelsea, and husband Garrett overlooking the South Branch Valley

And the Awards Just Keep Coming...

Rack up three more for the HF partnership. We were awarded the Environment Award 2001 given by the WV Environmental Institute, made up of regulatory agencies, industry, and citizen's groups. The theme was "A match made in 'Almost Heaven': marrying West Virginia's economic and environmental future." HF partner Cacapon Institute received the WV Watershed Network's annual award for "the watershed association who has best implemented agricultural land use practices...." And WVU Extension Agent Bob Cheves was recognized as WV Extension Agent of the Year, in part for his work with the HF partnership. And lest you think that we are getting too big for our britches, we ought to acknowledge that you, the customers, have made all of this possible—thank you and congratulations!

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