

Our Mission: *To promote and preserve unregulated direct farmer-to-consumer trade that fosters availability of locally grown or home-produced food products*

January 2010

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Food Safety Bills Move Forward in Congress

Reprinted with permission from December 2009 Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance newsletter.

On July 30, the US House passed its version of a food safety bill, HR 2749. After failing to pass on the first attempt, HR 2749 was amended to provide some relief for the local foods movement. Specifically, the bill includes a definition for retail food establishments that allows for some cottage level processing without FDA regulation. The amendments also inserted some exemptions in the registration and record-keeping sections of the bill for farmers selling directly to consumers. But HR 2749, as passed, still directs the FDA to set standards for how farmers grow and harvest some types of products, such as leafy greens, even for the small farmers selling directly to consumers. The bill also puts local facilities processing local foods for local markets under the same regulatory regime, and paying the same fees, as the major industrialized agribusinesses, like Dole and Del Monte.

Then the Senate began its process. In November, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) approved S. 510, the Senate version of HR 2749. While the FDA claimed at a hearing that the bill only covers food in interstate commerce, the language of the bill does not contain any such limitation and would impose sweeping regulations on all farms and food processors. On its face, the bill applies to any farm or food producer, regardless of the size or scope of distribution. Despite grassroots protests, the HELP Committee did not address the concerns of the small producers.

Both bills place significant emphasis on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). Although the concept of preventative controls is a good one, the USDA's implementation of HACCP, with its requirements to develop and maintain extensive records, has already proven to be an overwhelming burden for a significant number of small regional meat processors across the country. In the meat industry, HACCP has resulted in fewer independent inspections of the large slaughter plants where pathogens such as e. coli originate. At the same time, the USDA has imposed sanctions on small, regional processors due to paperwork

Share your story!

You are invited to contribute to this newsletter. Each month we would like to publish an article contributed by a member farmer or consumer. Many of you have ideas to share but may be reluctant to write an article—don't let that stop you. Let us know and we'll have someone call to interview you. The newsletter committee looks forward to receiving articles to consider for publication. Contact information on the back cover.



Taking the Mystery out of Buying Beef in Bulk

By Elizabeth Van Deventer

Bulk beef seems to conjure up images of Flintstone-sized hunks of beef dragged home and cut up with cleavers and hacksaws. Luckily, buying bulk beef is easier than that. Yet, it is confusing to someone new to the process, given the different ways farmers price and sell bulk beef, and the different ways butchers cut the meat. Buying beef in bulk is an inexact process, but is nonetheless a great deal.

Bulk beef can be purchased either as a whole cow (actually a steer or heifer, not an adult cow), a half, or a quarter. If buying quarters, request a “mixed quarter,” meaning that you get an equal amount of meat from the front and hindquarters. The price is determined in one of three ways: (1) by the live weight of the animal before it is slaughtered (“on the hoof”); (2) by the hanging weight, which is the weight of the animal after the head, hide, legs and innards are removed, or (3) by the final weight of the meat you actually take home. Hanging weight is the most common way of pricing, so that is what I’ll focus on here.

Since butchers weigh the whole carcass, most farmers will base their price on this weight and then calculate the final amount of meat they should get after it has been trimmed of excess fat and bones. The loss from trimming is anywhere from 30-45%. So if a whole carcass weighs 600 lbs, the farmer would multiply this by 60% (on average) to get a final weight estimate of 360 lbs. If the charge were, let’s say, \$3.10 per pound hanging weight, this would equal about \$5.17/lb final weight. The farmer will often charge a price range per pound final weight to reflect the possible difference of weight loss from carcass to final weight.

There are other variables: breed, age, style of fattening, and how the butcher cuts the meat. These will influence the difference between the carcass and the final amount of beef received. Don’t get too hung up on all this. However, if you see a claim that the percentage of loss between the carcass and final weight is less than 30%, it is worth asking some questions. Remember that you get a large discount for your bulk purchase, so in exchange you have to accept that quantities will vary a little. Also, some farmers price by hanging weight price plus butchering fees, while others pay the butchering fees themselves. Be aware of the pricing components when comparing prices.

What can you expect to get back in a bulk order? The breakdown is always the same: mostly hamburger, then roasts, then steaks. In one of our 100 lb quarters, I calculated that it resulted in 42% hamburger, 38% roasts, and 20% steaks. This will vary, but it gives you a rough idea – ask the farmer for his specifics. Usually, when you buy a quarter, you get a standard set of cuts, whereas if you buy a half or a whole, you can decide exactly how you want your beef cut up. The amount of beef in a quarter can vary from 50 lbs to 100 lbs, since some farmers are fattening weaned dairy calves while others are processing well-finished 1,300-lb steers. Ask the farmer how the animal is raised and what poundage to expect. You may also have a choice between wrapping the beef in freezer paper or vacuum-sealed in plastic.

Are you wondering how much beef is a reasonable amount to buy and how much space it will take up? The average American eats about 50 lbs of beef a year. We've found that our quarters (80-100 lbs) are enough to get two adults and a small child or two through a year. So a cost of approximately \$500 per year for a quarter of beef equals about \$41.66 per month, or \$10.41 per week. Not bad for local, grass-fed beef! If you eat a lot of beef, have a large family, or entertain a lot, then you may want to buy a half or whole. Start small – you can always buy more.

Taste, tenderness, and marbling will vary. Animals raised on grass will be different from those finished on grain. Humane treatment may be a primary concern, or just price. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Buy a few individual cuts from the farmer before you lay out a lot of money for beef that may not be to your liking. As for storage space, 30 lbs of beef requires roughly one cubic foot of freezer space.

What about the cost savings? In that same 100 lb quarter mentioned above, the customer would save \$200 over the same cuts at retail prices. This is a great savings if you are able to put up the money all at once. If all you eat is steaks, then buying in bulk is not for you. If you are willing to try a variety of cuts, then buying bulk makes great economic sense – and, even more satisfying, it gets you off the industrial food grid.

Note: I recommend *The Grassfed Gourmet* by Shannon Hayes for great recipes and methods for cooking pasture-raised meats of all kinds.

Elizabeth Van Deventer runs Davis Creek Farm with her husband Tim and their three boys. You can reach her at info@daviscreekfarm.com.

Announcing

BEYOND ORGANIC

a Virginia Biological Farming Conference

February 19-20, 2010

**Institute for Advanced Learning and Research
Danville, Virginia**

Speakers include many successful regional growers and researchers and

Ian Mitchell-Innes of Blanerne Farm,
Kwa Zulu-Natal, South Africa

*Holistic Resource Management for Improving the
Environment through Sustainable Agriculture*

-and-

Michael Ableman of Foxglove Farm,
Salt Spring Island, British Columbia
Beyond Organic

For details and to register, visit www.VABF.ORG

Or e-mail vabfconference@live.com

Or call Marilyn at (540) 291-4333

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Send all ads electronically to editor@vicfa.net. Specify the number of times to run the ad. Include your contact information in case of questions. Mail your check and a copy of your ad with your contact information to Editor, VICFA, PO Box 915, Charlottesville, VA 22902.

Deadline for receipt of Display and Classified Ads is the 15th of the month for inclusion in the following month's issue.

Send questions concerning Display Ads to Advertise@vicfa.net

VICFA Notes

Please welcome **Karen Oxford** to the VICFA Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors voted to sign onto the amicus brief filed on behalf of **Amish farmer Emanuel Miller in Wisconsin vs. Miller**. Here is the link to the brief itself. <http://www.farmandranchfreedom.org/content/files/amici-brief-091130.pdf>. For additional information, contact **Judith McGeary** at 512-484-8821 or Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org.

Thanks to **Anne, Dan and Elizabeth Buteau** for hosting the November Meeting. Hot soups, homemade cheese, butter and bread, a pasta casserole, delicious salads and cake and raw milk were all part of our pot luck lunch.

Participate!

Members networking and doing business with members is a win-win situation, one that is at the heart of this organization. From time to time, we will update ways to participate.

[Learn more about our upcoming Legislative Breakfast on page 7.](#)

Discount to members: Are there any products that you would like to promote to VICFA members at a discount. Consider publishing your discount offerings in the newsletter so that all members may take advantage. Just send a note describing your offer to editor@vicfa.net or mail to Editor, VICFA, PO Box 915, Charlottesville VA 22902.

Meet The Farmer TV covers local agricultural scenes around the state and you will see many of your friends among the fifty-plus shows. Check it out at www.meetthefarmer.com.

Come to Our Next Meeting!

Share in the VICFA experience: VICFA meetings are open to the public. Bring your enthusiasm, a friend or neighbor and a contribution to the pot luck.

VICFA meetings are held the second Sunday of the month. **New Meeting Format:** The business meeting is from 12:00 – 1:00 followed by a pot luck lunch and a general meeting from 1:00 – 3:00.

Our January meeting will be hosted by Bev Hill in Crewe, VA:

Sunday, January 10

2247 Tyler Road

Crewe, VA 23930

Phone: (434) 645-8905

From the northwest (Farmville): Take RT 460 EAST to the 460/360 interchange in BURKEVILLE. Bear right toward PETERSBURG, which is RT 460. Go about 4 miles to CREWE. At the PURE station (on left) and EXXON station (on right), make LEFT onto TYLER STREET. Go about 2 miles out of town. PASS intersection of Bible Way (on left); Mountain Hall (on right). You'll see 3 driveways close together on the left (marked by 3 brown 911 street signs and 3 mailboxes). Bev's is the 3rd. DRIVEWAY on LEFT at the top of the knoll.

From the southwest (Danville, Keysville, Green Bay): Take RT 360 EAST to 360/460 interchange in BURKEVILLE. Follow directions as above.

From Richmond (RT 288): Take RT 360 WEST about 35 miles through Amelia. At junction of Rts 360 and 307 - stay on RT 360 for about another 4 miles. Make LEFT at NAMOZINE RD (Route 615). There will be 2 one story brick bldgs on left and a VDOT terminal on right. If you pass VDOT, you've gone too far. Make no turns off this road - it will become RT 619 (Tyler Rd). Go through 3 turns and then down into a bottom. Coming out of the bottom, Bev's is the 5th DRIVEWAY on the RIGHT at the top of a knoll (look for 3 brown 911 markers, 3 mailboxes).

From the south (Kenbridge, Victoria): Take RT 49 NORTH to CREWE. At light, MAKE LEFT. At EXXON and PURE stations, MAKE RIGHT (Tyler Street). Follow as per directions above.

Come all the way down the driveway (1/2 mi) to the old house with 2 brick chimneys. PARK ON THE LAWN so others can get in.

Venison Preparation for the Home Cook

By Rachael Kambic

During hunting season, many home cooks are given the challenge of processing whole deer carcasses brought home by their loved ones. This may be viewed as an unpleasant prospect due to the commonly accepted idea that all venison has an unappetizing gamey flavor, but I find that the flavor of deer is simply an acquired taste, like lamb, and furthermore it is really only the large bucks that have a strong flavor. Does and younger deer are quite mild, and frequently can't be distinguished as venison. (In fact, I served Bambi burgers to co-workers for dinner and none of them could believe they were eating venison!) Those who have a particularly flavorful deer brought home to them, and can't stand gaminess, can mask the flavor by the use of spices. I also recommend soaking the meat overnight in buttermilk, yoghurt, and lager, which will lessen the flavor and tenderize the meat at the same time. The addition of herbs and spices can turn this into a marinade.

Venison is high in protein, iron, and B vitamins, yet low in calories and cholesterol because it is virtually fat free. While this is very desirable from a nutritional standpoint, it also means that, if not cooked properly, the meat quickly becomes tough and dry. Soaking large cuts overnight in a simple brine of salt, brown sugar, bay leaves, whole garlic cloves, chopped onion and whole allspice will draw salt into the meat, tenderizing it and causing it to retain more juices during cooking. Tougher cuts of meat can also be tenderized by the use of marinades containing acids in the form of beer, wine, vinegar or citrus. Pineapples and kiwis are frequently used in marinades for Asian cooking because they contain an enzyme which tenderizes meat.

Venison benefits from the addition of fat, which can be accomplished in many ways. Roasts can be larded by cutting slits in the meat and stuffing with pieces of salt pork, bacon, pancetta, fat back, suet, lard or butter. They can also be rubbed with suet or wrapped in bacon before cooking, although if you choose to wrap in bacon, it should be removed at the end of cooking and the roast should be broiled for several minutes to allow the outside to brown.

Ground venison should be mixed with minced bacon, fatback, salt pork or lard, as well as minced onion, garlic or mushrooms.

Roasts can be made from the tenderloin, back strap, shoulder, rump and bottom round and should be basted with stock, beer or wine during cooking. All venison can be made tender through the use of moist cooking methods. Venison jerky can be made by soaking in soy sauce overnight then flavored to taste (for example peppered, brushed with teriyaki, or coated in chili) and dried for 6 hours in an oven heated to 150 degrees. Venison can be easily substituted as the meat in many familiar recipes. Large cuts can be used for pot roast. Ground venison makes lovely burgers, tacos, shepherd's pie, lasagna, chili, meatballs and meatloaf. Cubed venison works wonderfully in stews, stir-fry, stroganoff, curry, fajitas and made into kebabs. The possibilities are truly only limited by the imagination of the chef, but for those who like to use specific recipes there are many cookbooks that are dedicated solely to recipes for preparing and enjoying venison.

Share your local recipes and food experiences. Send to Editor, VICFA, PO Box 915, Charlottesville VA 22902 or email editor@VICFA.net. Please note "Cook's Corner" in the subject line.

Venison Burgers

Yields 15 large burgers

Preheat oven to 375°

5 lbs ground venison

4 shallots minced (half of a red onion may be substituted)

1/4 cup garlic, minced

3 tsp. sambal (found in any Asian market and in the international section of most grocery stores)

1/2 cup fresh oregano leaves, chopped (or 2 tbsp. dried oregano)

1/2 cup lard or 10 strips of bacon, minced

Salt and pepper

Oil

Mix shallots, garlic, sambal, oregano and lard/bacon. Combine thoroughly with ground venison. Form patties (they may seem sticky and hard to hold together). Season with salt and pepper and sear over medium-high heat in a cast iron skillet or heavy bottomed FLAT sauté pan. Remove to cookie sheet and continue until all patties have been browned. Put in oven and cook until desired doneness.

Choices: The ACRES USA 2009 Conference

By Christine Solem

John Coles and I attended this year's Acres USA Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota. One or both of us have attended Acres for the past couple of years, representing VICFA/NICFA at the booth. The conference is fantastic—great people sharing great ideas, and of course, gossip about happenings (which both pull you down, yet stir you up).

This year was different, however, as there was no booth to man, and thus there were more choices as to which lectures to attend. Faced with such a variety of choices, many with overlapping time slots, and of course spread over the course of 3 days, we spent a couple of the lecture hour time slots just figuring out exactly what we wanted to do—and then we still weren't sure.

Of course we picked the lectures on raw milk, McAfee, Gumpert-food safety legislation, McGeary-activism 101, and Cummins. But we also wanted to have plenty of time for eating, sleeping and browsing without pressure. Did we really want to go to a lecture on soil, soil testing and soil fertility? Lecture hall chairs get hard quickly when you're not totally committed. We just ditched the dirt!

We left Charlottesville on December 2nd in the pouring rain and mud. I felt guilty about leaving our goat sitter to deal with all that, but I must admit not terribly-terribly guilty. Don't get me wrong, I love our goat sitter, but I was so happy to get out of there! Now, admit it everybody—one of the prime reasons for going to any conference is to get away from the grind for just a few days, so that you can be inspired and like it again when you get back.

Back to lecture choices: the keynote speaker for Thursday, December 3rd was Mark McAfee, the raw milk guy from California, speaking on Take Back the American Food Chain. No one misses the keynote speakers. These are the cream of the crop and there are no other competing lectures. There was a slight problem, however. HBO that night (we don't have HBO at home) featured the 25th Anniversary Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Concert at Madison Square Garden at the same time. The concert featured Bruce Springsteen, Simon and Garfunkel, Mick Jagger, Stevie Wonder, plus a host of others. For John, who is not into music, it was a no-brainer, but I stewed around about it all day. What to do? These guys were getting old—I might never have the chance to see them perform together again! Mark McAfee did have another lecture scheduled for the next day...

John went to hear Mark McAfee. I watched the aged rockers. They were great! They were still doing it! Art Garfunkel still belted out Bridge Over Troubled Waters with nary a crack in his voice. Mick Jagger still strutted around the stage, fast and no stumbling. Jerry Lee Lewis, who must be at least 75, pounded on the piano and sang Great Balls of Fire. Rather stiff, he didn't jump all around and crawl under the piano and play from underneath and shake his hair all over the place, but when he got through he kicked the piano stool over and threw it across the stage as of yore. Perfect! I was inspired—these guys still had the fire in the belly much like us old farmers. After all, isn't this fire all about passion and dedication? Keep stoking the passion and the dedication and you will never lose the fire!

I did go to hear Mark McAfee the next day and he was passionate! I also heard a lot of others speak and the fire in my belly was stoked. I learned that even if you don't quite get to all the lectures, for one reason or another, the Acres Conference still provides the most inspiring speakers, the latest in what's happening in agriculture and what the government is trying to do to us. And yes—it provides a few days off so the we can return home to deal with whatever dirt is in the way.

Food Safety Bills Move Forward in Congress *continued from page 1...*

violations that posed no health threat. Authorizing the FDA to apply a HACCP system to small, local foods processors could drive many of them out of business without truly improving the safety of the food processed in large centralized processing plants.

Ultimately, both bills create incentives for retailers to import more food from other countries. Not only do the bills burden family farms and small business, they also create dual standards because it will be impossible, in practical terms, to hold foreign food facilities to the same standards and inspections. This will hurt both our food safety and our food security.

The large industrial food system is broken. Poor agency oversight has simply compounded the problems created by the centralized growing and processing of food, which in truth, has led to reliance on imported foods and foods shipped all over the country. But increased regulations, record-keeping obligations, and penalties and fees could destroy the small businesses that provide an alternative through the local food system. Congress needs to focus on the source of the problems: industrial agriculture, imported foods, and massive processing. Taking away nutritious, safe food can only hurt the safety of our food supply by reducing consumers' options.

TAKE ACTION: We do not know when the full Senate will vote on S. 510. It might be in December, or it might be early in 2010. Don't wait! Call your Senators today and ask to speak to the staff person who handles food safety. Talk with them about the importance of local foods to both the farmers and consumers, stressing that local foods provide an important alternative to the mainstream food supply that has seen so many food safety problems. Urge them to support an exemption for farmers selling directly to consumers and for small-scale processors. State and local laws are enough for local operations. FDA regulation of every food source is impractical and counter productive.

Upcoming Legislative Breakfast

Let's SHOWCASE our wonderful way of life by serving homemade breakfast items to members of the General Assembly and their aides. The more VICFA members who participate, the larger our presentation will be. Don't miss this opportunity to lobby our law makers. Our focus will be an amendment to the Kitchen Bill (passed last year) to include pickles, relish, and salsa - important value added items.

When: January 20th, Wednesday

Time: 9:30 am until 11:30 am

Where: In Richmond, at the General Assembly Building, 4th floor Conference Room, West.

Why: Because it is important to be able to sell these homemade items!

Plan to participate by:

- attending and bringing a breakfast, or
- volunteering to send a breakfast item to share.

It's a great day of important fellowship. Talking Points will be available.

If you have questions, call Lois Smith at 804-366-6051

VICFA

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Charlottesville, VA 22902

VICFA

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