

Idaho's Bounty gives you access to unconventional ranch raised animals, such as elk and buffalo, which were traditionally wild game available only to hunters. As popularity of these two healthy red-meat options grows, I wanted to know why local ranchers from CA Bull Elk Ranch and Brown's Buffalo Ranch believe that ranch raised meat is the way to go.

I talked to Gail Ansley from CA Bull Elk Ranch, and she told me why ranch raised elk is so popular, compared both to other traditional meats, as well as to wild elk. Gail believes that elk has caught on because, even though it's a red meat, it is healthier than beef, pork, or chicken. 100 grams of cooked elk has only one more calorie than the same amount of cooked skinless chicken breast. So, as Gail puts it, "You can have your steak and eat it too." Elk is also lower in cholesterol than beef and chicken, and has 0.2 grams more fat than chicken, and way less than beef.

Gail also likes how sustainable raising elk is. Raising three elk takes the same amount of land and feed as it would take to raise one bovine cow. She likes to know that she is using all of the animal, and does so by making use of the meat, hide, teeth and antlers. She can sell velvet antlers on the wholesale market, where they are made into supplements, said to increase immune



health and heal many ailments, varying from arthritis to menopause. She also makes use of hard antlers by giving them to her husband, J. Calvin, who is an artist and creates beautiful lamps, rocking chairs, knife handles, and more with them (some are available to view and purchase online).

Ok, so elk is a sustainable product and a healthy choice if you are comparing it with other types of meat. But how does it compare to wild game elk? According to Gail, there are three reasons why ranch raised elk tastes better than wild elk. The first is that ranch raised elk doesn't have the "gamey" flavor that wild elk has. Gail explains that this is because ranch raised elk have a steady supply of good food, and are never forced into eating sage brush or other plants that may affect the flavor of their meat. Simply put, Gail can control what her elk eat and create a consistent flavor. The elk eat from the pasture in the spring when there is a lot of vegetation to eat. For the rest

of the year, Gail grows alfalfa and also provides corn stubble or barley straw, so that the elk can regulate their own systems.

The second reason Gail believes ranch raised elk tastes better has to do with timing. Hunting season happens to occur during the beginning of breeding season, when male elk are concerned primarily with attracting females. This causes the males to fight with each other, and they usually lose weight during this time. Hunters, therefore don't have a chance to hunt when the elk are at their ideal weight, but Gail can process them when they're just right.

Lastly, Gail believes that when an animal is hunted, it raises the anxiety and hormone levels in the animal, also resulting in that "gamey flavor." Of course, Gail is a rancher and not a scientist, but she has come to believe that the above is true through her years of experience.

I also talked with Debbie Brown of Brown's Buffalo Ranch in Nyssa, Oregon. Although buffalo used to be a widely hunted animal, they are now more commonly found on ranches. Debbie said the meat used to be a novelty, but as the health benefits became more commonly known, it has been growing in popularity. Now she is struggling to meet the demand.

Debbie explained that having buffalo is similar to having cattle, but buffalo are better for the land as they are natural roamers and don't disrupt it as much. They are self sufficient and eat a ranger mix of alfalfa and a little barley. They no longer eat any corn, as Debbie is working toward being more grass fed, even though Debbie pointed out that buffalo meat doesn't marble like beef does. It has a sweet, non-gamey flavor and is quite tender and delicious.



Brown's Buffalo Ranch has been a family business for 37 years, and now Debbie's youngest son is involved as well. Their only problem is not having large enough animals to keep up with the demand for healthy red-meat.

Enjoy!

Julia Augustus, Idaho's Bounty

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