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Goshen farm is Kentucky's largest bison producer

Nationally recognized Goshen farm is largest breeder in state

By Melissa Gagliardi

mgagliardi@courier-journal.com

If you've eaten bison at a local restaurant, chances are it came from the Kentucky Bison Co., located on a rolling farm in Goshen with stunning views of the Ohio River.

An old, refurbished farmhouse sits at the center of the 1,100-acre Woodland Farm, which is home to more than 400 bison.



Photos by Michael Hayman, The Courier-Journal

Business manager James Durr turned back a couple of bison with a pitchfork so he could retrieve a food bucket at the Kentucky Bison Co. farm in Goshen.

The farmhouse is home to Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, who bought the farm in 1994. They started the operation with just 20 bison from a Custer State Park in South Dakota and have turned it into a nationally recognized breeding farm and the largest bison operation in the state.

Business manager James Durr splits his days between the Goshen farm and the company's offices in downtown Louisville, where fresh bison meat is sold to local restaurants including Artemisia, the English Grill at the Brown Hotel, Bluegrass Brewing Co., Ditto's Grill, Ramsi's Café on the World and the Westport General Store.

And of course it's available at Proof on Main in the 21C Museum Hotel, which Wilson and Brown founded.

While there are some customers in Southern Indiana, Cincinnati and Tennessee, Durr said they work to keep most of the business local, and even sell the meat at local farmers' markets.

"The local people really do appreciate it," Durr said. "Customers like knowing the people who raise what they feed their families."

There are no hormones or steroids used on the farm, which has bison that range in size from 60

pounds at birth to well over 1,000 pounds.



One of the herds at the Kentucky Bison Farm in Oldham County roamed in a field. The farm is home to more than 400 bison.

Emilie Pfeiffer, who is in charge of marketing for the Bristol restaurants in Louisville, said when they first put bison meat on their menu, they were flooded with e-mails from customers who were impressed with the product.

"It has less fat than chicken or salmon. It's really a low-fat product, very healthy food," she said. "I think everybody should eat bison."

Don't mistake the animals for buffalo. These are American bison, while the only true buffalo are found in Africa and Asia. Durr said he sometimes gets calls from restaurants wanting to make buffalo mozzarella and he has to set them straight.

"Do you wanna milk one of these things?" he asks. The answer is always no.

While the bison spend most of their days grazing and lolling in the meadows, Durr said their docile appearance is somewhat misleading. The animals have been domesticated for only about 200 years and are not exactly tame, he said. He has been chased on occasion, and now carries a pitchfork to keep them at bay anytime he's out in the fields.

"They are huge and they can run as fast as a horse. I don't trust them 100 percent. They're still pretty wild," he said. "I'd like to love on them, but you just can't do it."

However, farmhands feed the bison buckets of grain in the mornings, more so to foster the relationship between man and beast than to enhance their diets, Durr said.

A handful of farmhands and groundskeepers keep the farm going, using environmentally friendly techniques, he said, adding that the goal is to keep the property the way it's always been, with a variety of native plants and grasses. It also has a variety of wildlife, including turkey, red foxes, coyote and beaver.

The company is growing and has started a second farm in Clark County, Ind. It now ships the meat all over the country and has a number of young bulls ready to sell to other farms interested in breeding bison.

In addition to meat, the company has begun selling a number of related products, from hides and horns to skulls and mounted bison heads.

The company handles every step of production, from birthing the animals to running the slaughterhouse and packaging the meat. And before the bison reach that final stage of life, Durr said, they've got it pretty good.

"These animals have the best lives possible -- they roam and eat and make babies."

Reporter Melissa Gagliardi can be reached at (502) 582-4117.
