

Bison meat niche grows across the West

As industry increases, Northwest producers want in

By ALIYA HALL
Capital Press

The bison meat industry has been steadily growing as consumer demand has increased and producers all over the country have shown interest in expanding or starting herds.

"More and more people are discovering that (bison) is sustainably raised and it's pretty darn delicious," Dave Carter, executive director of the National Bison Association, said. "We're at the point now where demand has exceeded supply."

According to the association, the bison business grew from \$340 million to \$350 million in sales over the last year.

Carter attributed the increase to rising prices. According to the monthly bison report from the USDA, young bison



Aliya Hall/Capital Press

Bison graze at Green Fields Bison Ranch near Dallas, Ore. Lori and Rick Hedlund have been marketing and selling their bison meat for two years.

bull carcasses are sold at an average of \$4.83 a pound, and grass fed filet mignon is sold at an average of \$44 a pound.

Although most bison production is in the Midwest, 14 Oregon ranches are registered with the Northwest Bison Association. Washington has nine members and Idaho has five.

One Oregon ranch, Green Fields Bison Ranch near Dallas, is getting more involved.

Lori and Rick Hedlund are going into their fifth year of operating Green Fields and their second year of marketing bison meat. At the moment they have 60 head of bison.

Lori Hedlund said that while

getting the infrastructure set up has been a challenge, they have learned a lot from their experience — and their animals.

"They are amazing creatures, though — it's a real privilege," she said. "We've learned from them and the way they live; they'll run, eat (and) rest, and that lifestyle

is probably a pretty healthy one."

While the Hedlunds have noticed a decline of bison producers in their area, they believe it's due to retirement because the industry is "very time-consuming," Lori Hedlund said.

Overall, more producers have been getting involved in the Northwest bison industry, said Alan Douglass, Region 1 director of the National Bison Association and president of the Western Bison Association.

"We're starting to see more activity and interest, but on a smaller level," he said. Producers who want a larger herd are more likely to move to an environment more conducive for the bigger herds of animals.

Originally from South Dakota, Rick Hedlund said the bison there thrive because it's their natural habitat; he compared it to raising a deer in the forest. Raising them in the

Willamette Valley, however, is more challenging — especially in the winter because of the mud.

"We don't have that real sod-forming grass, or frozen ground," Rick Hedlund said. "The Midwest doesn't get tom up as bad. If those million bison were out here in Western Oregon, they would have ripped this place up."

Historically, bison didn't migrate toward the West Coast, and that creates a disadvantage for bison ranchers, Douglass said. With the warmer climates near the coast, the animals will be much smaller than in the Midwest or by the Canadian border where it's colder and they need to be more robust.

However, Green Fields is taking advantage of the local market. While not certified organic, the Hedlunds use organic practices. They also pride themselves on grass-finishing their bison.

Dry bean industry excited about new yellow variety: Patron

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — Dry bean industry leaders believe a newly released yellow bean variety could eventually become a common sight in many fields across the state once it proves itself.

The bean, called Patron, was developed by Oregon State University bean breeder Jim Myers at the urging of the Idaho Bean Commission, which helped fund the project.

Idaho is the nation's leader in dry bean seed production. About 70 percent of the beans grown in the state are for seed.

Currently, only about 2 percent of the dry beans grown in Idaho are yellow varieties, but that could change with the introduction of Patron, said IBC board member Don Tolmie, production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co.



Courtesy of Don Tolmie

Patron, a new yellow bean variety, grows in a field near Caldwell, Idaho, on Aug. 9. Idaho bean industry leaders say Patron is the first yellow variety with "off-the-charts" resistance to bean common mosaic virus.

Patron is the only yellow bean variety with "off-the-charts" resistance to bean common mosaic virus, Tolmie said.

"I've got pretty high hopes that this Patron will become a pretty universal dry bean in the state of Idaho," he said.

Idaho's dry bean industry pushed for the new bean because of the growing popularity of yellow beans in the U.S. But the industry also hopes to sell yellow bean seed in Latin America, where yellows, also called peruano beans, are popular and fetch a premium.

The yellow bean varieties grown in Mexico and other Latin American nations have no mosaic virus resistance, Myers said.

"Compared to the traditional Mexican varieties, this is a quantum leap," he said.

OSU has issued an invitation for bean dealers in Idaho to negotiate for an exclusive license to produce the new variety.

Myers said the bean has resistance to all pathogens of mosaic virus and was developed to grow well in this part of the country.

"It's very well adapted to this region (and) the yield's been excellent with this variety," he said.

Myers also said Patron is an earlier season variety compared with other yellows.

Tolmie, who has grown Patron for OSU, said the new variety still has to prove itself, but so far it has performed well in southwestern Idaho.

It's still a little early to make hard claims about how well the bean grows, "but we've had some pretty good luck with it agronomically," Tolmie said.

"It's got to get into the market and circulate so people can make sure it fits the needs they require," he said. "But right now we're pretty optimistic."

Caldwell farmer Lynn Whitteg started growing Patron for Treasure Valley Seed Co. this year. He echoed Tolmie's comments about being too early to say for certain how it performs.

But, he said, "I think (it's)

going to be a pretty good bean."

John Dean, president of Idaho Seed Bean Co., which grew a few Patron seed plots for OSU two years ago, said it appears to grow well in south-central Idaho.

"It's an earlier variety than the standard yellow varieties we've had," he said. "It yields well for a shorter season variety and the color seems to be good. I'm glad they released it."

Wolves kill another calf in NE Oregon

Capital Press

Members of the Harl Butte wolfpack killed another calf Aug. 16 in northeast Oregon, prompting state Department of Fish and Wildlife managers to decide to remove two more wolves in an attempt to stop the depredations.

Wallowa County rancher Todd Nash said a calf was grazing on a private pasture he leases when the latest attack occurred.

He said the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife investigated. Department officials said the attack was confirmed as a wolf kill and managers will shoot two more pack members.

The department shot two of the pack's adult wolves after a series of attacks on cattle earlier this year.

Nash and other ranchers



Courtesy of Todd Nash

The carcass of a calf was found Aug. 16 in a private pasture rented by Todd Nash of Wallowa County, Ore. State Department of Fish and Wildlife officials will cull two more members of the Harl Butte Wolfpack in an effort to stop the attacks.

have called for the entire pack to be killed. He said the pack goes after cattle every day and has not changed its behavior.

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