

# CALIFORNIA **GRASSFED** BISON®

## Bringing them Home!



*Ken and The Betty feeding hay to our bison, early Spring, 2010.*

**BISON - Ancient symbol of abundance & prosperity.  
Today's symbol of hope and renewal.**

### **Welcome to our first Annual newsletter!**

If it hasn't escaped your attention already, this will confirm that 2010 has nearly come and gone without our regular quarterly newsletter.

As time passes, new projects have demanded more attention forcing us to consolidate and allocate our energy beyond ranch chores, the commute and seeing you at our weekly farmer's markets.



There's only so much two people in their early 60s can do and as much as we love staying current with you and what's happening with us, the bison and the

ranch, this year we reluctantly agreed that we can still do the newsletter as long as it is done annually.

Having said all that, while the newsletter will be once a year, from time to time we will send out brief reconnect bulletins and special announcements we think you would want to know about.

We hope you enjoy catching up on the news with us as much as we enjoy sharing with you. You are especially invited to check the announcements in the back of this issue!

Our blessings to you and yours for a wondrous holiday season!

Sincerely,  
Kathy & Ken

# the reconnect

FOR US, FOR THE ANIMALS & FOR THE EARTH

**THE RECONNECT FACTOR** *To forge and strengthen a new connection between people and their food. With each reconnect, we find we are part of a plan much grander than ever imagined.*

## - for us



*Sunset at Heritage Ranch.*

### The power of shared knowledge

This year we were glad to welcome a whole new crop of first time customers. Most of you walked up to us and the first words we heard were “I just saw Food, Inc. – I had no idea.”

And through the power of shared knowledge, we stand on common ground. We had no idea either until we read *Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Power Steer* by Michael Pollan. (<http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/power-steer>)

As we describe what to expect from our 100% grassfed bison meat, it's common now to have regular customers chime in while they wait, unable to contain their enthusiasm. As you can imagine, this is gratifying for us. After almost eight years, not only do we have an ongoing connection with regular customers, but they are forging new connections themselves to help welcome and encourage newcomers. This is how our business has grown – completely by word of mouth. We were all newcomers once.

As new customers come on board and as the recession stubbornly continues, this year we re-introduced our Sustainable Menu guide called the 15% Steak Rule which teaches about yield beyond steaks.

In learning about nose-to-tail products, another new tie is made with our bison and honoring all the gifts coming from the carcass. To many it's a brand new thought and, we are happy to say, it means there is something for everyone.

We're also excited to report that several of you have made strides in growing your own food. Many of you talk about potted veggies, while two other couples moved and are experimenting with gardens for the first time. One young couple has invested in a beehive and chickens and at last report, could not keep their small amount of honey in stock.

It's an exciting time for anyone willing to learn about, and become part of, the Food Movement in whatever way is reasonable.

Thank goodness for farmer's markets and small farmers – and thank goodness for our wonderful customers like you who support small farmers.

Together, we all continue to make a positive difference!

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## - for the animals

I've always enjoyed feeding hay to the bison. It's a toss up whether I like that better than selling the meat to our wonderful customers at the farmer's markets. But at the ranch, hands down, it's the best part of my job.



*The best part of my job at the ranch*

Last year, I began noticing the bison have lost their sense of needing a buffer between themselves and the hay wagon. To re-establish respect, for the first time we began using the verbal corrections “Shoo” and “No.” And a swat of my cloth hat on the closest offending nose if necessary.

Impressively they quickly responded. They now keep an acceptable distance, waiting until the hay is on

the ground instead of grabbing it off the back of the wagon.



*What did I do?*

Though it seems like a small thing, it actually is an important safety issue for us. Herd posturing often seen while feeding means the pecking order is always being established, re-established and confirmed. As two-footed critters, we're on the bottom rung of this ladder so we always want to create and maintain a safe distance from animals that may need to suddenly move out of the way.

## BISON STORIES

*This is just one of many stories we look forward to sharing with you. One by one, they light the way home.*

### **The orphan**

by Kathy



*Lindner Bison calf*

Most ranchers have what's called an attrition rate. That is, unavoidable death losses of livestock through predators, aborted fetuses, injury or other sometimes

unknown causes. Lindner Bison is no exception and our annual attrition rate seems to hover in the 2% range.

The last death loss we had was a mature cow. She had always been on the puny side and was less dominant. Helplessly we watched as she got weaker, knowing that she wouldn't make it through another winter.

Over the summer, I especially watched her calf with interest. Also on the small side, but with strong herding instincts, the calf seemed puzzled why her mom wouldn't even try to keep up with the herd. Instead the cow would slowly rejoin them and stay on the periphery. After nursing, I'd watch the calf flick its tail and want to join the other calves running nearby. Dashing ten feet ahead, it would stop, look back and slowly rejoin its mom.

As the calf grew a few months older, we began see it with some of the other calves while the cow was laying down resting. When the other calves returned to their mothers' sides, the little heifer calf stood alone, not knowing quite what to do. Eventually it would rejoin its mom. It was sad for all of us.

We talked with Kat. Now that the calf was close to being weaned and eating grass, we would try to get on our processor's schedule to come out for a mercy killing. Before this could happen we got a call from Kat saying that the skinny cow had died during the night. Her voice broke over the phone. A second cold front that had come in and as Ken had predicted, she just wasn't strong enough to survive it.

The calf was somewhere with the herd, so we knew if it could get food, it would be ok. But in a situation where the mom has been less dominant, it's not unusual for that to transfer to the calf, which would also now remain on the lowest rung in the pecking order and without a mature animal to look out for her. The more dominant animals always get first pick of the hay put out and would not allow her to come in until they were done. Then when they were done, they would move off to another section of the pasture. The calf without getting its fill would follow the herd instead.

"We'll just keep an eye on her," Ken said. "Nothing we can do."

Kat was already keeping an eye on her, we knew. A week later, we had our answer.

"Hey, you'll never guess what," Kat said over the phone. "That Margaret has adopted the orphan calf."

"You're kidding," I said, my auto-response to surprise announcements. Logically, it was doubtful. Margaret already had her own bull calf, so I was wondering if Kat just coincidentally happened to see the orphan eating near Margaret one day.

"Nope, she really has been adopted. She stays near Margaret and her calf." Kat paused a minute. "Boy, that Margaret . . .," she said her voice trailing off.

"I know," I said. "She's something. I can hardly wait to see next time we're up."

A week later, we were back and sure enough, it was as Kat had described. The tiny calf was staying close to Margaret and Margaret's bull calf. Though the orphan was older than the bull calf, she was smaller.

"If she ends up to be a runt like her mom, we want to take her off before she breeds," said Ken.

Kat understood and I agreed. We sure didn't want more of the same, but for now it was nice to see her being accepted by her adoptive family.



*Margaret, adopted orphan and bull calf*

A day later, I was watching the herd come for water near the bunkhouse. We had been working nearby, and as they often do, they hold their noses in the air to catch any new scents, wary that we are nearby.

I saw the orphan calf come up by itself and stand near the tank, moving aside for other larger calves and their moms as they stepped forward. *Darn. It seemed that she was alone after all.* As the family groups took turns drinking and left to return to the pasture, I saw Margaret and her bull calf begin to slowly approach the tank.

The orphan stood watching the other calves and moms walk away, unaware that Margaret had walked up to the tank and was standing there. The little calf turned to see who was there now. When she saw Margaret, I swear I saw joy sparks fly. The calf immediately flicked its tail and raised its bottom up in the air, springing two steps over to Margaret, immediately nuzzling along her side.

She may have tried nursing a now dry Margaret, as Margaret pushed her away with an irritated W. C. Fields' air of "Get away, kid, you bother me." While the calf obliged, neither one of them moved and instead drank side by side out of the stock tank. The orphan had found a safe haven.

I watched as they left the water tank. Margaret was slowly walking along with her bull calf and the small heifer calf was between them. Together as a unit they left to rejoin the herd.

A month later, we almost didn't recognize the orphan. She had gained so much weight and was nearly the same size as the bull calf. By the next summer she had held her weight gain and had become a robust yearling heifer.

The experience reconfirms and offers a positive glimpse into the importance of keeping bison in family groups. It allows the natural pecking order to be

expressed. Though herd dynamics are always in a state of flux, we believe the natural order of family groups provides a prosperous environment for the entire herd.

## - for the earth

*Trying to compress a year's events into one newsletter may be a daunting task, but one we increasingly value. Ken's report covers activities, progress and the ongoing learning curve tossed our way by the rhythmic response of the soil, plants and animals at Heritage Ranch to weather, temperature and our on-site availability two days every 11 days. Every year we learn more and every year we yearn more to live here.*

### Annual Ranch Report

by Ken

#### Winter, 2009

While Kathy worked on a computer project and as weather allowed, I built a sloped drying rack for the bulky hides from our animals. Winter robes are the heaviest and often most valuable, so being able to easily salt these down and dry them properly is important.

The rack is 12 feet by 16 feet, able to hold four smaller hides or two large ones.



*New hide rack*

It is equipped with a sliding tarp, (something like a venetian blind), that slides up and down to protect the hides in wet weather, while still allowing them to dry.

## Spring, 2010

A wetter than normal January and February found us with cooler temperatures in March and April. In March we seeded 300 pounds of annual rye seed in the south end of the hay ground. This was to thicken an area of sparse growth, caused by watering difficulties last summer.

In April we over-seeded a portion of the south pasture, using a mix of brome and orchard grass and a spreader type of alfalfa for nitrogen. To keep the animals off the new grass, the area was enclosed with electric fencing creating a future rotational paddock.



*Paddock fencing for rotational grazing*

About a month later, in place of three electric strands at the far end, we installed a 12-foot wide tube pipe gate which we found on Craig's List. This was done with the welcome help of our niece Beth and our new nephew in law, Asaf who were here for a short visit from Pennsylvania.



*Bracing placement for the gate with our nephew Asaf.*

As irrigation started up in May, I built a welcome covered porch on the front of the little bunkhouse where we stay.



*Bunkhouse porch, phase 1*



*Bunkhouse porch, phase 2*



*Completed ! Keeps us more comfortable in the summer!*

A few short months later, this helped keep the inside cooler and allowed us to get out of the hot sun.

Though we were happy to see the cool wet spring, by the time we got into June, we found the temperatures were still too cool to allow good growth of our pastures and hay ground. In fact the cool weather created a domino effect. Usually first to emerge, the alfalfa fixes nitrogen which encourages the grass to grow. This year the growth of alfalfa was practically non-existent. Without the alfalfa to fix nitrogen, grass growth was also slowed.

Compounding the poor yield was what can only be called a rodent population explosion. We and our neighbors have never seen so many ground squirrels, rabbits and gophers emerge in one season. The gophers especially did tremendous damage, eating a good part of our meager alfalfa yield. This led to a 50% reduction from the entire hay ground. In dollars and cents, it means the hay we did cut and bale was grown at a tremendous per ton cost. Regardless of yield, overhead costs stay the same. We were also forced to buy expensive hay early, another unplanned cost. So despite our best efforts, in the end, Mother Nature always has the last say.

Topping off the cool weather calamity, our March and April seedings did not do well. The annual rye did not come up at all, so the effort and expense yielded nothing. The Ebb Tide mix did come up, but was spotty and weak. Throughout this period we learned some valuable lessons. We believe now that the young plants coming up were exposed to below freezing temperatures at night and many simply did not survive.



*A cold spring resulted in a meager two hay cuttings*

We also have come to realize that our method of drop seeding affects the survival rate of the seed planted. This method has been the best we could do for these past years, but now the survival rate of seed purchased has become critical. We set about finding a better way to plant seed. Too much of it is wasted otherwise, and grass seed, like everything else, seems to continue to only go up every year in cost.

### **Summer, 2010**

In July, the neighbor who does our haying suggested that it may not be worthwhile to take a second cutting from our hay ground, because growth was so poor. This was very disappointing to consider. We decided to keep the water on anyway to keep everything we still had alive through the hot summer.

While it meant continued high pumping costs without yield in the short term, we figured it was the best choice to allow for a reasonable start in Spring 2011. At that time, a duplicate effort will be made to overseed again and recapture our usual hay production capacity.

The good news is that we had another wonderful calf crop with 40 new calves born almost all at once.



*New cinnamon bison calves begin to arrive*

By July, unfortunately, they began to regularly break through the electric fences surrounding the over-seeded areas in our pastures. This was caused by many things, not the least of which included inexperienced ranch help feeding at the wrong time of day and unbeknownst to us, sometimes not feeding at all. Add to that mix new calves that did not know what the fence was about and a few determined cows that decided they wanted into more lush pasture. It proves what we've always been told that with bison, unless they have everything they need, they will go find it.

The continued break-ins convinced us that more stout cross fencing was necessary. In September, we launched an all out effort to regain their respect of our fencing. We also added four-foot high field fencing where three strands of electric fencing had been. We doubled the number of steel t-posts supporting the fence. On top of these, we strung an electric wire. And they were back on their regular feeding schedule.

So far, so good!

Over the summer, Kathy's research paid off. She found a 50-year-old John Deer "Grasslands Drill" seeder for a quarter of the cost of a brand new seeder. On our last trip to the ranch we finally were able to see it in action and it looks like it will work. The important thing is that all the pieces are there and functional and that parts are available for maintenance.



*50-year old drill seeder to improve our grass seed yield*

It is small enough to be pulled by our small tractor and will drill the seed into the ground instead of leaving it on the surface. This is exactly what we were hoping for. It should greatly increase our grass seed yield and help protect the newly planted seed from any unexpected late freezing temperatures, as well as avoiding dry surface conditions during germination.

## Fall, 2010

In September, we received an unexpected phone call on our way to the ranch. Our ranch hand had just gotten to the ranch to move the water and said when he got there, he found a big hole in the ground at the pump. We immediately told him to stop running the pump until we could get there and see what the situation was.

When we arrived later that day, what we found strained our imagination. Before us was a gaping hole in the earth with a two-foot diameter. We couldn't immediately see the bottom of it, but after adjusting our eyes, realized it extended down about 10 feet and had carved out another 10 feet under the cement slab which housed our 100 hp irrigation pump.



*Sink hole 2'x10'x10' the result of a tiny water leak.*

Literally half of the cement slab was unsupported. Where earth had been the day before, a cavern now existed exposing the pump casing going down into the ground.

Where did all the soil and gravel go? It couldn't have just evaporated. As we stared at the gaping hole in the ground, we had a difficult time integrating what our eyes were telling us.

The service person arrived the next day. Part of the test included turning the pump on to confirm water gushing out into the hole. No such water emerged, in fact, after nearly an hour of the pump running, no water was visible and the cavern remained the same.

Finally, we turned the pump off so we could discuss the situation. As we were talking, I heard a faint trickling of water. It sounded like a tiny creek coming from the cavern. Before it couldn't be heard over the roar of the pump engine. Finally, we had our water source.

As it turned out, what caused the giant hole was traced to a seemingly insignificant above ground leak. This leak had been there for years and squirted a tiny stream of water on top of the cement slab when the pump was running. This tiny stream ran over the edge of the slab, liquefying the ground under the slab.

Over the years, the vibration from the pump jellied the soil, working it gradually down. Finally the soil, sand and gravel entered the pump shaft and were pumped out over our fields.

This all took place over many years. The leak was there prior to our buying the ranch and explains why even our new pump had been pumping gravel and sand in the two prior years.

A proper repair and many cubic yards of pea gravel later, the hole is gone and the gravel in our irrigation lines are no more – a very happy ending to be sure!

On September 25<sup>th</sup> we had a late-born, healthy calf. This is the latest calves we've had and is from one of our original cows. As the weather turns colder soon, it will be fine as its mom is a very attentive mother. We've actually read about bison calving in January in Alaska and surviving fine!

## Future home site

In October we staked out the area where we intend to build our ranch house. We have decided not to wait until the housing market recovers its senses (heaven only knows when that will happen) and instead build in stages as we can afford it. We chose an eco-friendly kit log home, a long held dream of ours. Much of the log erection we'll do ourselves using our tractor to lift the heavy logs. Foundation work and roofing must be done by someone else with the necessary skills and equipment.



*Home site staked out helps keep our dream alive.*

Once the walls are up and roof is on, it means living in a work zone for several years. We know this arrangement will add to our already strenuous work schedule and because of that, it's been a tough decision to make. But it is the only way we can make progress since our original plans were stalled in 2007 when the housing market crashed. Our entire savings from our IRA account will be used to finance the kit.

## Winter, 2010

Winter at the ranch usually begins with zero temperatures in mid-November and runs through March and April. When we left the ranch this morning, weather

reports were coming in predicting the first snow by Saturday just before Thanksgiving.



*It's snowing!*

More often than not the snow doesn't seem to last very long. But every season we're hopeful that the first snowfall marks the beginning of plenty of winter moisture to restock the aquifer and get next spring's pasture and hay grasses off to a great start.

A special bonus is that our bison love the snow and cold!

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## Special Announcement!

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### 2011 Spring Tree Planting at Heritage Ranch!

We've decided that trees for the ranch just can't wait any longer. Our pastures are overdue for a badly needed windbreak so we are setting aside a minimum of one week for that purpose. The windbreak will extend one-half mile to one mile and drip irrigation put in place. Other windbreaks using living fences aka hedgerows will also be planted so the more able hands the better!

Because many of you have wanted to visit the ranch this is the perfect opportunity to announce a date far enough in advance so appropriate arrangements can be made. Tree seedlings will arrive for planting in early May at the beginning of our calving season.

Everyone is responsible for their own transportation. For those driving from the Los Angeles area, it will take an entire day or about 10-11 hours. Arrangements may also be made to fly into Reno and drive from there.

At the ranch, there will be room to bring a tent and camp or go into town about 30 minutes away where we have a special motel rate of \$48/night (2 people) or \$42/night (1 person). We will provide one mid-day meal each day.

All approved visitors are asked to abide by *Heritage Ranch Rules* which will be made available at the time of application approval.

We are excited about this first ever, adults-only event at Heritage Ranch and look forward to hearing from you! Email us: [klindner@lindnerbison.com](mailto:klindner@lindnerbison.com), Subject heading: 2011 Spring Tree Planting!

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## Other Announcements

### - Excellent bison article!

We're happy to receive reprint permission from authors Kathleen O'Neal Gear and W. Michael Gear to feature two of their excellent articles on our website. One is entitled *Bison Genetics – The New War Against Bison* and the other is called *A Brief Look at the Evolution of Bison*. They contain new overlooked information concerning genetic purity issues and flawed testing protocol!

### - Sirloin Tip Holiday Bison Roasts!

Orders for holiday roasts must be received by December 8th for cut-to-order sizes. Otherwise, the sirloin tip roasts are in the 3 to 4 lb. size on a first-come, first-served basis. As many of you know, it's a wonderful slow oven roast sure to satisfy those you love.

### - Grassfed bison tallow soap!

We've been out of soap for some time now due to a shortage of ground fat which gives us the best yield when rendering. So we've been saving it and may be able to again offer the soap after the first of the year or shortly before. Robert and Katie McDaniel, authors of *The Elegant Art of Handmade Soap Making*, have graciously agreed to make it for us again this year and have been patiently waiting for the fat. Many of you tell us their soap is the best yet!

### - 2011 Calendars!

We're rushing to make these available again in time for stocking stuffers or to begin the New Year. Call, email or ask us at the farmer's markets. \$12.95.

### - Price Increase

Reluctantly we've found we need to raise some prices on the meat to offset expenses. A cool spring and summer resulted in hay costs *doubling* from last year. These occurrences are an unavoidable part of ranching and though we do our best to keep prices down, sometimes Mother Nature overrules us. As always, we are grateful for support and your business!

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*California Grassfed Bison, Bringing Them Home!* is an annual newsletter put out by Kathy & Ken Lindner. In between newsletters, we can be found selling to our wonderful customers at the farmers markets, shipping to our wonderful customers, at the ranch seeding, weeding, feeding, or enroute between Heritage Ranch & southern California.



It is our passion, our privilege to help strengthen the reconnect between you and your food by sharing our ongoing journey of producing 100% grassfed bison meat & helping to restore a native heritage animal to California.

We thank you so much for your support! *Kathy & Ken*

*All photographs by Ken or Kathy Lindner, unless otherwise noted.*