

## Fall Newsletter – Sept 2008

### Lots and Lots of Lambs

We had a very good lambing season at Dunhill Ranch this spring with lots of good-looking twins. The lambs are all at least five months old now and are growing rapidly on grass—they all go out in the field every day. The rainy season started early this year so the grass is very green and the lambs love it.

Our Great Pyrenees dogs are doing a super job of protecting the flock and have not lost a single lamb this year, even though we are overrun with coyotes. There also have been several reports of wolves in the area, but they have not bothered us so far.

We have lambs weighing 90-110 pounds available for sale right now. Place your order today! Call 575-854-2847 or e-mail us at DunhillRanch@Hughes.net

### Green Lamb? You Bet!

These days “green” products are all the rage, and it’s often difficult to figure out exactly what the producer means by “green”: what’s a “green” car? Or a “green” oil company?

How “green” is Dunhill Ranch? Well, we have always tried to produce lamb that is as natural as possible. We strive to minimize the use of stored hay (fed only when grazing is not possible). In that way, we also minimize the fuel necessary to truck it in. In addition, we combine trips to the processor as often as possible and walk out the barn whenever we can in order to reduce our use of diesel.

Our lamb is as natural a product as you can get. We do not use antibiotics, wormers, or hormones on our lambs. If one of the lambs gets very sick and we have to treat it with antibiotics or other drugs, it is specially marked and is not sold to our customers. We want to make sure that the lamb you buy

from us is the best lamb available anywhere.

Lambs raised on processed feeds with little exercise will grow faster, but they will almost always have more fat on them, and fat is what produces the “mutton” taste that many people find unpleasant. In addition, lambs confined closely so that they can be fed efficiently need periodic doses of wormers and antibiotics in order to stay “healthy”. Our pasture-raised lambs get plenty of exercise and need no chemical additives.

We try to be “green” in all aspects of our lambs’ lives, even when it comes to composting. The lambs eat a lot, and thus produce a lot of manure. In many lamb operations, the manure is left to accumulate, and can easily pollute the ground water. Our manure goes in our garden and on our fields, and since we keep our production to sustainable levels, it never causes a problem.

Finally, the lamb you buy from Dunhill Ranch is about 7,000 miles closer to you than most of the lamb in the grocery store, much of which comes from New Zealand and Australia. Think of all the fuel you can save by buying locally!

### No Room for a Whole Lamb? Get a Half!

Many people feel that they don’t have room for a whole lamb in their freezer or that they won’t eat that much lamb; 35-45 pounds of meat can seem like a lot at first, although in reality, it is easy to fit that much meat in a small freezer.

Not to worry! We are happy to split an order in half for you and a friend, and we can usually find someone to share an order with you.

Don’t let a small freezer deprive you of the best tasting lamb you will ever have!

## Lamb Tagine

Serves 4

This dish is commonly served in North Africa. We have never been there, but those who have tell us that every kitchen has its own variation. We like this one because it is really simple to prepare. It needs to cook for a long time at low heat in an oven-proof, deep-sided, casserole dish. The dish should have a cover, but you can improvise one with tin foil and a pot-lid or plate, if necessary. This dish would probably cook just fine in a crock-pot, although we have never tried it.

### Ingredients

2 cups chopped onion (1 very large onion)  
2 cups lamb shoulder, cut into 1" cubes  
3-4 cups eggplant, cut into 1" cubes (about ½ a medium eggplant)  
1 cup dried plums (4-5 ounces)  
½ cup blanched almonds  
3 Tbs Ras-El-Hanout spice mix (see below)  
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Salt and black pepper

### Technique

Peel and chop the onion coarsely; the chunks should be about 1" cubes. Place them at the bottom of the casserole dish. Sprinkle with 1 Tbs spice mix.

Cut the meat from a 3-pound shoulder, trimming any external fat away. Put it on a plate and season generously with salt and pepper. Distribute the meat evenly over the onion. Sprinkle with another Tbs spice mix.

Add the almonds, prunes, and eggplant in even layers to the dish.

Sprinkle the remaining spice mix on top and drizzle the olive oil so that it is as evenly distributed as possible.

Cover the dish and place it in a 300 degree oven for 3 hours. Add ¼ cup of water to the dish and re-cover. Cook for another 1-2 hours.

Mix the layers and serve with crisp fried potatoes or a rice pilaf.

Rumor has it that this dish, like most stews and casseroles, tastes better on the second day, but we've never managed to wait that long to eat it. Maybe your moral fiber is tougher than ours.

### Ras-El-Hanout

This pungent spice mixture can often be found in Middle-Eastern markets or on the Web. There are infinite variations on the theme—no two mixtures will ever be the same. Some recipes have over 100 ingredients, some unusual and some truly weird, and while we don't recommend that you try adding Grains of Paradise, Belladonna, or Spanish Fly to your stash, rest assured that others have done so before you, and they are mostly still alive.

This relatively simple mixture is adapted from *The Essential Mediterranean Cookbook* from Thunder Bay Press (a great book to own). If you don't have all the ingredients, feel free to experiment with what you have. If you use decently fresh spices and stay close to the proportions listed here, it will turn out okay.

1 tsp. turmeric  
2 tsp. allspice  
4 tsp. black pepper  
1 whole nutmeg (grated)  
1 whole clove  
7 cardamom pods  
½ a cinnamon stick (crushed)  
¾ tsp. cayenne powder

Put all the ingredients in a spice grinder or mortar and grind into a fine powder. We use an el-cheapo mini-chopper kept for this purpose. At various times in the past we have used an old pepper grinder, a coffee mill, and a wood chipper to grind spices, so use what works for you.

## Are Our Sheep Free-Range or Not?

At Dunhill Ranch, our sheep are allowed to roam the pastures at will whenever the weather and grass permit. Most people would call this "free-range", but the federal government has some funny ideas about exactly what constitutes free-range, and it's not clear that we can use this term to describe our sheep, since we corral them at night to protect them from coyotes and mountain lions.

We feel that protection from predators is a good reason to keep them confined at night, and should not affect our ability to call our sheep free-range. Alas, no one from the government asked us when they were writing the rules.

Regardless of what the government says, we feel that our sheep live as natural a life as possible, and that this helps to produce a superior quality of lamb using methods that are gentle on the environment.



Our Border Collie, Meg, moves the sheep out to pasture

## Some Quick Tips for a Well-Behaved Dog

Here at Dunhill Ranch we spend a lot of time training our dogs to help out with the sheep. The techniques that we use to teach herding dogs to fetch the flock from a quarter mile off are the same ones that are used to train household dogs. Here are

some simple things you can do to help your dog understand what you want.

Be consistent. If your dog is not allowed on the couch, then your dog is never allowed on the couch. If you use the word "down" to mean "lie down and don't move until I release you", make sure that it always means the dog must lie down and not move. Remember, if you are inconsistent the dog will be confused, and you will get frustrated. If several people will be giving commands to the dog, make sure that everyone uses the same command.

Set up for success. Try to teach a new command in a situation where the dog will naturally do the right thing. When we want the dog to turn around and get away from the sheep ("back-off"), we'll teach this in a narrow alley where the dog can only go backwards. That way the dog gets it right every time and learns quickly what is wanted.

Be fair. Never punish a dog for not understanding. It takes many training sessions before the dog can understand even simple things. If your dog does not understand, repeating the command will not help matters. In this case, you need to show the dog what is wanted. For example, if your dog does not sit when asked, gently push on its chest and rump until it sits, and then praise the dog with "good sit".

Keep it fun. Make sure the dog gets a reward for doing the right thing. You can use treats, but praise and petting are just as effective. Keep training sessions short; even the smartest dogs burn out mentally long before they are physically tired.

And, above all, have one command that will stop your dog no matter what else it might be doing: stop, sit, down, stay, whatever. The word doesn't matter as long as the dog instantly obeys and doesn't move until released by you. When you pick a release word, use something that will not occur in ordinary conversation; we use "vamos" (Spanish for "let's go") for our dogs.