

Newsletter – Spring 2012

Time to Reserve Lambs

Well, spring has finally sprung, and the lambs are just getting ready to head out to the fields. This is always a busy time at Dunhill Ranch, since the young lambs are very excited and it often takes several weeks of new experiences before they will settle down to serious grazing.



Young lambs learning to obey a herding dog

The lambs are doing well so far, and we expect that they will be ready for market, as usual, in late August. If we manage to get any rain this summer, some of them might even be available earlier, since they are growing quite well now.

However, due to the prolonged drought, we are still raising a reduced number of lambs and so it is again very important that you reserve your lamb ahead of time! We will only have about 60 lambs for sale in 2012 and some of those will be reserved for USDA-inspected retail meat sales. Since we have already received many reservations for lambs, we expect to sell out long before autumn. If you have recently received a communication from us about your reservation, you need do nothing more. Otherwise, please contact us as

soon as possible- don't delay and miss out on the best tasting lamb you can buy. Reserving your lamb does not require a deposit.

Please note that the prices listed on our web site for 2012 are our best estimates only. We have not yet heard from our suppliers about what they are charging for hay, processing, and fuel this year, so our prices are still subject to change.

You can e-mail your reservations to sales@dunhillranch.com or call us at 575-854-2847. Please remember to include your phone number so we can call you when your lamb becomes available.

Young Shepherds at Dunhill Ranch

The drought affecting central New Mexico has forced many changes on Dunhill Ranch. In response to the amount of grass available, we have reduced the number of animals that we are pasturing; even so, we still cannot afford to graze over 90% of our land until we get some rain and the grass has more of a chance to grow. Happily, we have several neighbors who have pastures that have not been grazed in many years, and who are willing to let us graze our sheep on their property. Unfortunately, none of these pastures are fenced for sheep, so we can't just let the sheep in and forget them.

A full-time shepherd is the obvious solution, and through the organization known as WWOOF ([Worldwide Opportunities On Organic Farms](http://www.worldwideopportunitiesonorganicfarms.com)), we have established connections with young people who are interested in volunteering on farms and ranches in return for room/board and the opportunity to get hands-on experience with non-industrial agriculture.

Last year was our first time hosting WWOOFers (as the volunteers are known) and we were

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Algerian Lamb Shanks

This recipe is adapted from one published by [Williams Sonoma](#) several years ago. The combination of orange and wine with pungent spices makes for a heady dish best served over couscous or rice and accompanied by a strong red wine. Since lamb shanks are always in short supply around Dunhill Ranch, we have occasionally substituted lamb shoulder in this dish. Even so, it tastes great. Serves 4

Ingredients

4 lamb shanks
4 Tbs olive oil
1 lb yellow onions, diced
¼ cup peeled garlic cloves
1 Tbs finely chopped fresh ginger
2 cardamom pods peeled or 1/8 tsp ground
1 tsp chili flakes
1 tsp ground cloves
1 tsp caraway seeds
2 tsp fennel seeds
½ cinnamon stick
2 tsp salt
2 Tbs curry powder
½ cup blanched slivered almonds
½ cup golden raisins (regular raisins will do)
20 oz diced tomatoes (canned will do)
1 bottle white wine (minus a bit to drink!)
Zest and juice of 1 orange
1 lb carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped
1 fennel bulb, trimmed and coarsely chopped

Technique

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Season the lamb shanks with salt and pepper. In a deep, heavy, ovenproof pot, heat 2 Tbs of olive oil until nearly smoking. Brown the shanks on all sides. Set aside.
3. At this point, if you are lucky, your pot will have all kinds of browned bits sticking to it. This is good. If, as sometimes has happened to us, the browned bits have turned black, clean them out of the pot before continuing.
4. Add the remaining 2 Tbs olive oil and the onions and garlic to the pot. Cook on medium high heat, stirring frequently, until the onions are tender and translucent.
5. Add all of the spices, almonds and raisins

to the pot and cook about 5 minutes more.

6. Add the tomatoes, wine, orange zest and orange juice and stir to mix well. Put the shanks in the liquid and bring to a simmer. Cover, transfer the pot to the oven, and cook until the meat nearly falls off the bone, about 2 hours. Check the pot occasionally to make sure that the liquid has not all simmered away. If it looks a bit dry, add some water.

7. Stir the carrots and fennel bulb into the stew, cover and bake until the vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes more.

8. Serve over couscous or rice and drizzle each serving with olive oil.

Greek Lamb Burgers

This recipe was adapted from one created by Christopher Bakken, and originally published in [Food and Wine](#) magazine. Serves 6

Ingredients

2 lbs ground lamb
2 minced garlic cloves
½ tsp dried oregano
1 tsp minced mint leaves
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp coarse salt
½ tsp black pepper
2 cups pitted, oil-cured, black olives
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
1 Tbs chopped parsley
10 oz firm feta cheese, cut into 6 slices
6 large rolls, split and toasted
1 large tomato, cut into 6 slices.

Technique

1. Light a grill. In a bowl, combine the lamb with half of the garlic, the oregano, mint, cinnamon, salt and pepper. Mix gently and pat into 6 burgers. Let stand for 15 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine the olives with the remaining minced garlic and process until coarsely chopped. Add the olive oil and process to a paste. Scrape this tapenade into a bowl and stir in the parsley.
3. Brush the burgers with oil and grill them over a hot fire until medium-rare, about 4 minutes per side. Carefully put the feta slices on the grill and grill just until hot, about 10

Greek Lamb Burgers - Continued

seconds per side. Sprinkle the feta with oregano and set each slice on a burger.

4. Spread the tapenade on the rolls. Top with the burgers, and tomato slices.

Young Shepherds at Dunhill Ranch - Continued

very fortunate to find three enthusiastic young people interested in learning all about shepherding. Their backgrounds were as diverse as can be imagined but they all brought a strong work ethic and an intense desire to learn everything they could about sheep ranching.



Summertime Shepherding - Hot, Dry, and Dusty

And learn they did! One tends to forget, in these days when everything is automated, just how much knowledge and skill are required to effectively manage creatures that have minds of their own.

The initial training required of a shepherd, before s/he can even begin to work without constant supervision, takes about two weeks. First, the new shepherd must learn all about sheep: what is normal behavior, what is not, how to spot potential problems, and how the sheep respond to a wide variety of external pressures- anything from a hole in a fence to a pack of coyotes. The shepherd also has to learn to read the pastures: how much grazing can a given location sustain, where the spots are where the sheep simply won't settle down, no matter how good the grass is, etc.

At the same time, the new shepherd has to learn all about herding dogs (we use Border Collies), including over 30 commands and infinite variations on those commands as

they are used in different situations.

Once the new shepherd has become proficient in controlling the dogs and sheep when s/he is in close proximity, we start throwing curve balls, such as: "Move the sheep at a grazing pace through a wooded pasture, where you can't always see the entire flock. Now do it from the other side of a fence. On horseback. When the wind is blowing 50mph out of the North."

From these few examples, you can begin to appreciate that shepherding is a highly skilled job and see why it can take a month or more before a new shepherd feels comfortable with the sheep, the dogs, and the pastures.

Of course, there are ongoing chores involved in managing sheep, and the new shepherds take an active part in these too. Fence repair, horse maintenance, welding, carpentry, plumbing, gardening, and painting are just a few of the skills that the new shepherd learns at Dunhill Ranch. As one of our WWOOFers commented: "I learned more in 6 weeks spent at Dunhill Ranch than I did in 3 years at University. I cannot recommend this ranch enough."

The best part about the WWOOFers that we have had at Dunhill Ranch, is that each of them brought their own perspective and past experience to the new job. We encouraged them to ask questions and offer suggestions when improvements could be made. This allows us to teach and learn at the same time- a terrific combination.



Jeremy Dillon - Graduate of the Dunhill Ranch Shepherding Program

A Shepherd's Holiday...

At Dunhill Ranch, we count ourselves very fortunate to live in a beautiful place and have dedicated four-legged workers to help us out. However, there is no denying that it's a seven-day-a-week job, and that we occasionally yearn for a chance to get away for a little rest and relaxation.

Last September, for the first time in a long time, we had a chance to take a real vacation. So where would you guess that shepherds would go on vacation? The beach? The Big City? Try Scotland, to see the International Sheepdog Trials.

For those of you who never saw "One Man and His Dog" on television, sheepdog trials are timed events designed to test the capabilities of herding dogs and their handlers. Each dog/handler team must demonstrate mastery of a set of tasks which, while highly stylized, represent everyday task on a sheep farm or ranch. These tasks include fetching sheep from upwards of a half-mile off, moving the sheep steadily through a series of obstacles, separating one or more sheep from a flock, and getting a very reluctant group of sheep into a small pen. The level of competition is intense, and it's not unusual for the winning team to be determined by a couple of points out of 120 or more. It's not too much to say that an International Sheepdog Trial is like the Olympics, complete with national flags and television coverage.



Pastoral Pleasures - Penning Sheep at the International Sheepdog Trials - Tain, Scotland

For us, it was a grand chance to see 20 or 30 top-level teams in a day and compare their different working styles to what we were familiar with from working with our own dogs. While we are mere novices compared to the teams on the field, we were very pleased to find out that we could predict in advance what would happen, or what needed to happen, in many situations. We also learned many finer points of technique and style from more experienced shepherds who had come to watch the competition.



A Pastoral Remedy - Edinburgh, Scotland

Lest you think that we are hopelessly single-minded, we did spend several weeks in Scotland not watching dogs (though sheep were everywhere). Apart from good food, good beer, and good company, we got to watch a splendid rugby match in Edinburgh. For those of you unfamiliar with this gentle pastime, rugby is a colorful spectacle featuring two gangs of hooligans inflicting sensational violence on each other with nary a policeman in sight. As an antidote to a pastoral life, rugby has no equal!