

WRITTEN

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Home
GROWN

**THE ORGANIC GRASS-FED BEEF THAT MADE HUNTER CATTLE
CO. JUST BECAME YOUR NEW FAVORITE GRAB-AND-GO SNACK.
SLIM JIM'S GOT NOTHING ON OUR LOCAL STEER.**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CEDRIC SMITH



Hunter Cattle founder Del Ferguson decided, along with his family, to move out to a farm outside of Stilson, GA, to begin living off the land and leaving a healthier legacy for the family's 11 grandchildren. He now supplies many of the restaurants in this region with organic beef and now his soon-to-be-famous jerky.



Hunter Cattle Co. began packaging their dry-aged beef earlier this year, a process that takes a little longer than traditional jerky, but results in a tender treat that is shelf-stable. Try some at huntercattle.com



The funny story behind Hunter Cattle's growth from family farm to a local source of 100% grass-fed beef and pasture-raised pork is that it all came about by accident.

Farm patriarch and founder **Del Ferguson** decided, along with his family, to move out to a farm outside of Stilson, GA, to begin living off the land and leaving a healthier legacy for the family's 11 grandchildren.

People in the area started asking where to buy their grass-fed beef, and before they knew it, **Hunter Cattle** was learning to cut and process their meat right on the farm to meet the needs of chefs who wanted quality fresh beef from a local source. And in early 2018, the farm officially started packaging their dry-aged beef.

"Dry-aged beef has been a great addition to what we're doing," Ferguson said.

It's easy to look at Hunter Cattle's packages of dry-aged beef and think you're in for some trendy organic beef jerky. But, as **Kristan Fretwell**, general manager and another of Hunter Cattle's founders, explains, jerky and dry-aged beef are made through two different processes.

"Jerky is sliced and then smoked, and it's done in about two days," Fretwell said. "Dry-aged beef starts with a cut like a beef loin, gets rubbed with spices and hangs in a controlled environment to dry for 21 days before it's sliced and packaged."

The result is a meaty treat more tender than jerky—perfect for people who struggle with jerky's tough and chewy texture. And with no MSG (monosodium glutamate) added, the flavor is completely natural and healthier than some other



options on the market. The sweetness of the meat doesn't even come from added sugar; Hunter Cattle uses raisin juice.

"People always ask me which of our five flavors is our best-seller, and they're all best-sellers across the board," Fretwell said. "My favorite changes every few weeks, but this week, my favorite is the [MooMa's Beef] Sticks. I love chewing on the beef sticks."

MooMa's Beef Sticks offers a different texture but a similar seasoning to MooMa's Original dry-aged beef. Some might think the Bonfire Jalapeno flavor is the spiciest, but it comes second to Pa's Peppercorn. The Tin Roof Teriyaki is by far their most mild flavor, and the Farmhouse Garlic offers a bold taste for garlic lovers.

"We've always had frozen product," Fretwell said. "But this sliced, dry-aged beef is our first shelf-sustainable product and that's opened a lot of doors for us."

Many people wonder what the benefit is of eating grass-fed beef—and what the alternative beef ate, if not grass. Grass-fed cows spend their entire lives foraging for and eating grasses that are high in protein in open pastures. Raised this way, the cows aren't given hormones and antibiotics that are later harmful to people because they don't need them. They're naturally higher in healthy omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants such as vitamin E and have lower amounts of LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

However, the cows that are raised in concentrated animal feeding operations—where the quantity of meat produced is given higher priority than the quality—are fed whatever will fatten them up the fastest, such as grains and other foods not normally a part of cows' diets. As a result of their diet and their living conditions, the cows are more likely to get sick. The cows receive antibiotic and hormone treatments to try to keep them safe from their sick fellows and grow up faster than free-range cows.

To combat the tough and bland meat these conditions create, companies often add MSG and nitrates—bacteria-killers in meat products that, under certain circumstances, can cause cancer cells to develop in humans—to improve the flavor.

"The thing about nitrates, MSG and all that—this is stuff we don't want to feed our families," Fretwell said. "Naturally, we're not going to put it in our food."

"Cows are herbivores," she continued. "With our farm, we believe if you feed them what they would normally eat and keep them in their natural environment, it's better for the cow and it's better for the Earth."

Hunter Cattle farm products can be purchased directly from their website, huntercattle.com, and at stores like **Whole Foods** that carry locally-sourced products. ■



OUR COWS EAT BLADES (OF GRASS)

WHAT IS "NATURAL"?

AS DEFINED BY THE USDA, A NATURAL PRODUCT:

- Contains no artificial ingredients or coloring.
- Has undergone minimal processing.
- Hasn't been fundamentally altered.
- Is labeled as natural or organic.

HUNTER'S DRY-AGED BEEF IS UNIQUE IN THAT:

No antibiotics, growth hormones, or additives are included.

No sodium nitrate, a preservative salt linked to increased cancer risk, is added.

They're gluten-free, so those with celiac disease or sensitivity are safe.

Cows eat only grass in organic pastures, where measures are taken to prevent environmental contamination.

THANKS TO A NATURAL PRODUCTION PROCESS, THESE PRODUCTS ALSO DON'T HAVE:



Genetical
Modifications



Nitrates



MSG



Preservatives

