

CALIFORNIA GRASSFED BISON®

Bringing them Home!



Lindner Bison first calves of 2009.

**BISON: Ancient symbol of Abundance & Prosperity.
Today's symbol of HOPE & RENEWAL.**

Spring – a wondrous time

Each Spring, like most folks, we look forward to the signs - spring rains, the scent of flowers, trees budding out and birds singing. It's a time of expectation, reinforced by the arrival of new life at the ranch.

Other signs of Spring come from the bison - the cows start hanging back from the herd, they leave the area when we arrive. Even when putting out new hay, instead of vying for a dominant position, they seem more indifferent and wander away, preferring instead to wait now for the grass to green up.

When we arrived at the ranch the first Monday in May, two gifts were waiting. We spotted the first cinnamon-colored calf laying near its mom and the herd.

As we approached the back pasture, we noticed a cow had separated herself from the herd and was laying down with her calf nearby, born perhaps within an hour of our arrival.

After a 10 hour trip, suddenly we weren't tired. Instead of unpacking the truck, we rushed to get the binoculars from inside the bunkhouse and traded glimpses of the newborn calves as the herd slowly began to drift away.

Many are surprised to learn that bison calves are only about 40 lbs. at birth. By Christmas, their average weight will reach 500 lbs.

Within hours of being born, they must be ready to run with the herd, but if there is no need, we find they mostly sleep and nurse the first day or so. By the end of the second day, there were 3 more calves, and the ones born the day before had their tails in the air and were bouncing around close to their moms.

To us, each year's healthy calf crop is confirmation that the environment we provide is working. They do just fine without any other help from us. They are an extremely hardy species, surviving without the coddling necessary in other areas of livestock production.

We glean from them a sense of hope and renewal, which they seem to naturally provide by their presence. It seems they are fragile and strong at the same time, reminding us, perhaps, that we are too.

For now though, we know only that it is Spring again and the joy of life at Heritage Ranch comes forth to greet us.

Happy Spring to you & yours!
Kathy & Ken

THE RECONNECT FACTOR

To reinforce and strengthen the connection between people and their food source. With each connection made, we find we are part of a plan much grander than we imagined.

FOR US, FOR THE ANIMALS & FOR THE EARTH

- for us

Gratitude

We've recently been forced to consider that, for us at least, there may be no greater gift than the love that is expressed by others through words of gratitude and acts of appreciation for our efforts.

One recent email in particular thanked us for our work, and ended with “. . . and for bringing such a beautiful spirit to it.”

It was moving, it made us stop and ask ourselves a new question. It's such a miracle for Lindner Bison just to have just survived this long doing what we believe is right and good. And to be able to share it with others is such a gift in itself.

So we wondered what else could this person have seen? We're just two people, not unlike you.

Throughout our lives, and still from time to time, we're aware we've been given credit far more than we deserved. In hindsight, what we've learned finally, is that God doesn't seem to mind so much what our intentions are, or the part that our own selfishness, fear and even greed played in motivating us to do something different (like raise bison). It's more about what is done along the way, and the choices that are made once we know what the options are.

These are the things that ultimately define us. Not the moments, but how we deal with the moments, what we do with them, how we use them.

We believe it's the bison that bring the beautiful spirit. Their nearly countless gifts of life include sustainability, resilience, and renewal, both physically and spiritually.

It's the bison that bring a light to our lives, and perhaps through us, this may be what others see. The only credit we can claim is that we made a conscious decision and commitment to each other to remain teachable. Daily we ask to be guided.

As their grateful caretakers, we are a small part. Being guided along the way, for the greatest good, means being open to the greatest good - for us, the animals and the earth. If we listen, their hearts seem to speak through our hearts. And grateful hearts reflect that back.



Lenny, our caring neighbor "How can I help?"

Caring

We are thankful for our neighbor, Lenny, and another neighbor Jolyn.

On hearing we were short of help this winter, we got a phone call. "How can I help?" Lenny asked before even

saying hello. He and his wife Debbie had just returned from a 2 month trip.

We believe that Lenny and Jolyn, were chosen by the bison. We are most blessed to have them in our lives.

- for the animals

Winter feeding

Even with the welcome snowfall, January and February produced a fairly mild winter, with temperatures staying above zero degrees.



Sierra snows

We did stay in the low two-digit range for many weeks. It was normal for the temperature to be about 12 degrees when the sun came up in the morning.



Early February winter morning

When it's cold, the bison need additional feed. The digestion process helps create body heat. We've

learned that increasing the coarseness or “steminess” of the hay quality, creates more heat during rumination.

During the colder winter days, we feed hay from the 2nd or 3rd cuttings of the previous summer. This has the coarser content and lower protein levels which help the animals stay warm.

The first hay cutting, which is much richer, is saved for spring when the pregnant cows begin lactating and need higher nutritional content for developing calves within.

Bison calving time is May – June

Though this can vary, it’s pretty much the norm, with gestation period of about 9 months.



2009 Lindner Bison calf, a few hours old, using telephoto lens.

BISON STORIES

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

bison communication

by Kathy

When we bought the ranch, we knew that the pastures would have to be irrigated in order to keep the grass growing during the hot summer months. We also knew that the lightweight irrigation wheel lines, which were on the property, would quickly become “tinker toys” for our

bison, so these would be used strictly for our hay pasture, not accessible to the animals.

The question became: How do we irrigate the pastures where the bison are? Using the phone and the internet we began searching for suitable irrigation equipment for use with bison.

Two facts became clear: (1) no bison producer would knowingly leave bison in the same pasture with any traditional irrigation equipment unless they wanted to produce scrap metal in short order, and (2) no one had tried the new K-line pod irrigation system with bison.

Exhausting all options, and with no known K-line users in California at the time to talk with, we ordered the K-line irrigation system for use in the pastures with the bison.

Developed in New Zealand, the system consists of multiple heavy plastic bowl-shaped black pods which are open on top where individual sprinklers are mounted.

The pods are connected by industrial hoses, which are then fastened to a hydrant on one end. A cap and metal loop at the other end enables the irrigator to hook the line to an ATV and move the line to the opposite side of a central hydrant. By snaking the line back and forth each day, the irrigator can get the water distribution needed to grow grass.

Our bison watched from a distance as we trenched and installed mainline pipe for days, immediately filling the trench in the pasture in order to keep them, and the new pipe, safe.

Finally, it was time for the last phase of the installation: Pulling the 13 corresponding 650-foot K-lines into position and connecting them to the hydrants. With the bison in the south pasture, we started this process in the middle pasture.

Without water in the hoses, each line weighs about 1500 lbs. One at a time, we hooked them up to the back of the pickup, and slowly pulled them into place.

Working all morning, we finished the middle pasture by noon. We broke for lunch and were ready to install the last lines in the pasture where the bison were.

After linking up the first 650 ft. pod line to the back of the truck, Ken pulled up to the south pasture gate.

Just inside the gate about 30 feet away, three cows and two calves were at the stock tank for water. We waited respectfully for them to finish and watched as they left the area to rejoin the herd.

It was time. Getting out of the truck, I swung the 12-foot gate open and stood with it, just inside the fence.



Getting ready to pull the first 650 ft. line into the south pasture.

As Ken slowly drove the truck forward through the gate, I monitored as one by one, the black pods dutifully followed each other at 50 ft. intervals through the gate and into the pasture behind the truck. Ken passed the stock tank and headed to the far side of the pasture away from where the herd was grazing.

Keeping the K-line straight was important, so that the entire line completely cleared the gate before being pulled into position at each hydrant. I hung onto a walkie talkie, should anything unexpected occur that Ken couldn't see. "We're so smart to think of using walkie talkies," I thought.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a mature cow appeared, her tail in the air. At first I thought she was headed to the stock tank for a drink and had her nose out of joint because now she'd have to wait. But her energy was different. She was on full alert.

She looked over at me, and then back to the stock tank. I followed her gaze. There, separated by the moving pod line was a calf - obviously her calf - who had dawdled, and couldn't be seen from our vantage point on the other side of the gate. I couldn't believe it.

Dumbfounded, I stared at the cow, who was loudly grunting to her calf. The calf responded with baby-sized grunts and stood motionless on the far side of the tank.

When adrenaline kicks in, it's amazing how everything suddenly slows down into micro seconds. My mind

raced and as quickly as I considered calling Ken, I dismissed it. There he was, oblivious to the unexpected scenario unfolding behind him. If I called him, and he stopped the truck, the gate would still be wide open for the K-line, and we didn't want animals going through it.

If either the calf or cow got tangled up in the moving pod line, either they or the equipment could be hurt. If I did nothing and the animals stayed put, the pod line would soon be completely inside, and I could close the gate.

I drew a deep breath and told myself to stay calm.

For a few seconds, the cow studied the situation of the moving pod line separating her from her calf. I watched closely as the cow's gaze followed the extension of the moving line to its passage through the open gate, and then to me, the one holding the gate open for this snake-like intruder.

What came next was completely unexpected.

At the instant the cow made the connection between me and the pods separating her from her calf, I saw what can only be described as a silver strand of energy shoot directly from her chest to me.

Not knowing if this meant the cow was getting ready to charge, instinctively I turned from her toward the gate. With my back to the cow, slowly I began feigning closing the gate, stopping just short so as not to interfere with the remaining pods Ken was still pulling through.

I looked over my shoulder to see what effect this had. With tail still in the air, the cow dropped her head and, snorting, took a few steps toward the moving pods. Suddenly she ran toward them and with a flick of her tail, jumped over the moving K-line, joining her calf. Calf safely by her side, she immediately turned back to face the moving line, tail still held stiffly in the air.

At the gate, an eternity passed while I waited for the last pod to pass through. Finally, the entire line was in. I closed the gate, stepping outside to safety.

As the last pod slid by the pair, the cow trotted forward into the pasture, grunting loudly all the way, calf by her side. She stopped one last time, looked toward the last pod moving away, flicked her tail again and they both headed quickly toward the herd.

A quarter mile away, Ken finished hooking up the first pod line and drove back to the gate to hear what he had missed. That day, we learned about a form of bison communication we had never experienced before – laser-like direct messages.

Later that summer, we would hear from our neighbors how our bison cows would charge the fence if they

thought horseback riders were getting too close to their calves. This apparently caused the horses to whirl in place, nearly unseating their riders. The riders quickly learned to take a different route. We believe the horses saw and felt messages similar to what I saw and felt that day, and we completely understand.

When it comes to protecting their calves, bison cows mean business. And when it comes to bison communication, well, there's nothing quite like it.

Kathy's special note: I am reconciled to the possibility that in telling this story, I may be regarded as either having a wild (yet endearing) imagination, or perhaps am just a little bit crazy. Gratefully, I'm at a stage of my life now to where I don't seem mind so much what folks may think. In fact, I especially love this part of getting older! Either way, it doesn't matter, mostly because it doesn't change what happened. We had one unhappy bison cow, and boy, did she let me know it!

- for the earth

RANCH REPORT

by Ken

Planting grass for weed control

During the first months of 2009, progress was made to clear tumbleweed, using the tumbleweed plow that I built. In the non-irrigated section of the middle pasture, this year's battle was won and nearly all tumbleweed was burned. Problems with our Ranger vehicle and weather thwarted progress in the south pasture, but this area will be cleared in time.

Rye. In the past, we tried to control tumbleweed growth by planting rye seed. It seems that rye has a tendency to "clean up" the ground where it is planted, because it exudes a chemical, which stunts growth of other plants near it. However, the plantings of rye over the past two drought years were unsuccessful, in our un-irrigated areas, because of the lack of rain.

In researching the problem, we learned that tumbleweed can survive on only 4 inches of rain a year! Basically this means, like all good weeds, it will thrive when everything else is withering. Rye grass needs a minimum of 6 to 8 inches to survive. To compete, we needed a grass that does well with 4 inches of rain, like the tumbleweed.

Siberian wheat grass. In talking to our seed representative, I learned a few things. As it turns out, tumbleweed (aka Russian Thistle) comes from Siberia. There it receives little rain and can survive extreme temperatures. Tumbleweed was introduced into this country in the 1800s in a shipment of contaminated flax seed and since then has pretty much covered the western part of North America. It grows where the soil has been disturbed, native vegetation has been removed

and living conditions are tough. Almost nothing can out-compete it. (NOTE: The next time you are in a high desert area covered with sagebrush, notice that no tumbleweed is growing among the sage. This is because our native sage will keep it out! Another good reason to preserve sagebrush wherever it can be found in the American West.)

During talks with our seed rep, I was introduced to Siberian Wheat Grass. This grass comes from the same part of the world as the tumbleweed and is said to survive well on the same limited rainfall. It is palatable to grazing animals, has the correct protein content for bison, and is a perennial grass, which will reseed itself. It is not invasive and will share with other grasses.

This year we put 200 lbs. of Siberian wheat grass seed on the non-irrigated middle pasture area. A maximum effort was made mid March to get this done, when weather reports made us aware of a storm expected the next week. Kathy was forced to miss the Wednesday farmer's market so we both could get the remaining tumbleweed burned and the seed on the ground before this storm. We got it done!

Now we're waiting to see how these two "old acquaintances" from Siberia compete. The ground was heavily seeded to give the grass the advantage. This summer will tell the tale. If this experiment works, then the same process will be carried out in the south pasture as well next year. Stay tuned....

Fencing

At the end of March, to protect the newly planted Siberian Wheat Grass, Lenny and I put up an additional electric fence. Any newly seeded grass must be protected from grazing for the first full year to allow it to establish itself before grazing.



The new electric fence is about 1/3 mile long.

We alternated the posts with used steel T-posts we found on Craig's List, and step-in fiberglass posts. Three strands of "wire rope" were strung, and the top and bottom strand are electrified, while the middle strand is connected to ground.

This means, if an animal touches the middle strand along with either the bottom or top strand, it will receive a static-electricity type shock. The shock is not harmful in any way. It is like the static shock you and I get after shuffling across a carpeted area and then touching a doorknob, but it is more powerful, necessary to get the attention of a large animal.

Gopher mound management

A new effort was launched to reduce the number and severity of gopher mounds on the property. These mounds are potentially harmful to our bison when they run and the mounds are hard on haying equipment too.

In March, I designed an "above ground plow" which can be easily towed behind our ATV and Ranger.



Front view of "above ground plow" used for dragging

This was made from scrap metal generously donated by our neighbor Jolyn. Jo says she believes it's better to put things to good use than to have them lay around. We agree, and in exchange, we're glad to drop off meat from time to time as a kind of barter. It seems to work out great for everyone and we feel good about it too.

The plow is six feet wide. This may sound big, until you've got 150+ acres to drag at 5 mph. As Lenny and I both know, it takes time and it usually takes dust too. A second plow was built in early April to help speed up this effort before spring growth in the pastures began.

They both essentially "shear off" any ground that sticks up more than one inch above ground level and then evens it and spreads the soil behind it.

They are also designed to minimize any "damming effect" while dragging, allowing soil, rocks and other debris to easily pass under or over it. It is remarkably

effective in smoothing our ground without tearing up low lying vegetation or using heavy ag equipment.

Past years of no-till policies in our pastures has allowed these gopher mounds to accumulate to the point where they are not just a minor nuisance any more.



Gopher mounds before dragging.



Same gopher mounds after dragging.

Dragging began in late March and by April we finished. It was slow going this year, as we leveled 3 years of mounds all at once. Yearly upkeep will make a difference in mound management, now that we have these tools!

FOR THE RECORD

Items you may find interesting.

We're excited to let you know of two incredible food documentaries being released this summer!

We've screened both and absolutely cannot say enough good things about each of them! They are informative and inspiring toward taking the next steps for all of us to create and reclaim clean, humane and ethical food production.

NOTE: the urls below are in the cover email for easy linking.

FRESH!

4 minute trailer (featuring Pollan, Salatin, Allen):

<http://www.FRESHthemovie.com>

Independent film producer: Ana Joanes

Informative, solution-based motivating, inspiring.

FRESH! will be available for online streaming.

Food Inc.

3-1/2 minute trailer (Schlossberg, Pollan and Salatin)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqQVII-MP3I>

Producer: Robert Kenner

Thought provoking, informative, jaw dropping;

from those who brought us "Inconvenient Truth"

Limited nationwide distribution begins June 12th

<http://www.robertkennerfilms.com/>

Please support these filmmakers by attending and passing this information along to others. Together, individually and collectively, we can make a positive difference!

FRESH! Panel following the screening

Lindner Bison was honored to be invited to be part a panel following the screening debut of FRESH! at the Newport Beach Film Festival in April.

Other panelists included Dale Whitney, Manager, Long Beach Farmer's Market and Margaret Cherry, Food Editor/Secretary, Harbor Area Farmers Markets.

Victoria Bloch-Coulter, LA Chapter Leader of Weston A. Price Foundation was an effective moderator for an impassioned group. The audience responded, asking good questions and expressing renewed interest in making a positive contribution to ethical food production.



Ken and Kathy Lindner, FRESH! Panel, Newport Beach Film Festival, Photo by Ann-Marie Michaels, www.realfoodmedia.com.

Ken introduced what may be a little known public fact, which he hopes food documentary filmmakers will shine a spotlight on in the future:

The aging farmer population in our country is critically high. It is estimated that aging farmers who are +60 years old, out-number young farmers who are +30 years old, 50:1.

This means that new younger farmers are needed, and they are needed now!

Kathy described Lindner Bison as perhaps the best and most immediate example of two people who came from Corporate America without any agricultural background. Kathy's family was in ranching, but the ranch was sold after the Depression. Lindner Bison literally started from scratch and didn't even own land for the first 4-5 years.

Lindner Bison's message:

If we can do it, so can you! Start now. Don't look to us (aging farmers) to do it, because in 10-15 years, many will be gone -- we'll either be retired or dead. This is the reality.

So the question then becomes: Where will your food come from? What happens to the land when there are no new young, American farmers to replace us?

Immediate possibilities may include:

- Big Ag/Big Food will take it over the land
- Housing developers will buy and develop it, or
- Food will be produced offshore and imported

Tell your children to start now. If you have cousins, or brothers and sisters who may be interested in clean food, tell them to start now. If you are interested, even if it's only a planter box on your balcony, start now.

New farmers and ranchers are needed for clean, ethical food production. They are needed now.

For details of our journey from Corporate America to producing grassfed bison, please visit our website:

<http://www.lindnerbison.com/articles.html>

and select

Our Story: Sustainable Appetite, Sustainable Passion

If we can do it, so can you. Start now.

California Grassfed Bison, Bringing Them Home! is a quarterly newsletter put out by Kathy & Ken Lindner on a not so quarterly basis. In between newsletters, we can be found either selling to our wonderful customers at the farmers markets, shipping to our wonderful customers, at the ranch seeding, weeding, feeding, or enroute to and from Heritage Ranch.

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

We thank you so much for your support!

Kathy & Ken Lindner

