

## They Say His Grass-Fed Cattle Look Too Fat

Doug Gunnink knew he was doing something right when a customer complained that his beef looked too fat to be grass-fed. When he first switched to grass fed beef, even he didn't like the product that well. After a couple of years, he began to see improvements.

Recent research has shown grass-fed beef to have higher rates of "good" fat than grain fed beef. It is also the richest natural source of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), shown in animal research to fight heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other ailments. As people are becoming more health conscious, they want these benefits, but they don't want to give up good tasting beef. Gunnink thinks he has found what it takes to satisfy both consumer desires.

Gunnink describes his ideal animal as having a lot of depth and width to the chest and a lot of rib as well. He also likes a big wide rump.

"We like old style Angus with a smaller frame," he says. "A big wide muzzle seems to go with chest capacity and a big wide rump," says the cattle breeder. "They seem more durable, not as many health problems, and they stay in pretty good flesh even on mediocre winter feed. When they get on good grass, they put on weight."

Gunnink is recording weight gains of up to 3 lbs./day on grass, equal to many grainfed feedlots. On average, his cattle are hitting 2.6 to 2.7 lbs. average daily gain (ADG). In the winter, that falls to 1.5 to 1.7 ADG on a light ration of alfalfa grass hay.

Gunnink moves his cattle to fresh grass twice a day. "We are running about 2.5 stock-

ers on an acre by pushing the land a bit with fertilizer and reseeded every 3 to 4 years," he says. "We started with worn out alfalfa pasture overseeded with brome and orchard grass. We have moved toward rye grass pastures."

Today, Gunnink is working with new, improved tall fescues. He is a distributor for Barenbrug Seed, a Belgian company that gathers seed from throughout the world. Gunnink is using some rye grass from Rumania and fescues from other parts of the world.

"The Europeans have done more research into quality grasses, while U.S. companies have concentrated on corn, soybeans and alfalfa," he says. "They have put their research dollars into developing a more productive, more digestible, more palatable grass."

Gunnink stresses that good grass requires a good variety and good fertility. He likes to see soil tests with a pH at least in the 6.5 to 6.7 range. Phosphorus should be up in the 45 ppm range. He prefers a soluble P source such as liquid fish with its other micronutrients. He often applies gypsum to get both calcium and sulfur.

Gunnink is confident grass is the way to go. He knows intensive grazers netting \$300 to \$500/acre with grass. "A lot of those were dairy," he says, "but we are doing very well with beef."

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Beef that's grown on grass has health benefits and can also taste good, says Doug Gunnink, who says he has found what it takes to satisfy both consumer desires.



David Ronniger produces the largest selection of potato varieties available anywhere in the U.S. He specializes in varieties that originated in the 1800's or earlier.

## Potato Grower Specializes In Old-Time Varieties

By Janis Schole

Ronniger's Potato Farm in Moyie Springs, Idaho, produces the largest selection of potato varieties available anywhere in the U.S. Owner David Ronniger specializes in varieties that originated in the 1800's or earlier. He has introduced old European cultivars here that have gone on to be in great demand in the current "health spud trend."

The farm is located five miles west of the Montana border, and 15 miles south of Canada.

Ronniger's potatoes range from colorful red, yellow, purple or blue-fleshed varieties to the standard white-fleshed types. Their shapes vary equally, from round to oval fingerling, to horn shaped.

He works with potato geneticist Chuck Brown of the USDA in a breeding project that is developing potatoes with elevated levels of antioxidants and carotinoids - characteristics that are in high demand in the health food market. Ronniger grows out new clones and has already produced one red-fleshed variety that is used to make potato chips.

Ronniger's 75-acre farm produces only 25 acres of potatoes annually, but he also contracts out 20 acres of potato production with other growers in Washington, Colorado and Canada. He sells seed potatoes to large commercial farms, small farms and home gardeners, and four years ago, started pursuing specialty markets like restaurants and grocery stores with production of small potatoes measuring less than an inch across. These can be any variety, but the hills are crowded and harvested early.

Many of the varieties he grows have interesting names, like, "Candy Cane," "Huckleberry," "Pink Pearl," and "Russian Banana,"

and are equally interesting looking and tasting.

Eight family members work full-time, but at harvest he hires about 45 people. He uses a machine from Holland that strips the vines, pinches the plants, and jerks them out of the ground to dry them out. The potato skins harden in about 10 days.

Ronniger also produces organic garlic, shallots and onion seed.

A seed catalog is available.

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