

"Wait until you taste this!"

Let us say things as they are: restaurateurs are hard-to-please people. Many who have tried selling to restaurants have kept a bitter taste from the experience. But even though we have been told many times that restaurants were a waste of time and energy, this will be our 3rd year as the exclusive lamb supplier of some local restaurants. And we just love it!

Even if we like to say that Icelandic meat sells by itself, some important details can make the difference between a bitter deception and the beginning of a long-lasting and interesting business relationship.

Here are some tips from our own experience:

☞ The very first thing

Know the regulations of your country, province, state, or city. Here in Quebec we have the food inspection that dictates all the rules and delivers the licences that you need to sell, keep, transport, or process food. This is the very first step and the most important if you do not want any problems.

☞ Know your product

I know this one sounds obvious, but how can you

sell it if you are not convinced that this is the best lamb they will ever taste! If you do not eat and cook your lambs, it will be hard to talk about it.

☞ Choose your restaurant

Have a look around. Which are the restaurants that believe in local products, already have lamb on their menu, are considered fine cuisine or good table, have a middle- to upper-class clientele, etc.?

☞ Call first

Call first, but be sure to call outside the rush hour. The best time if they do lunch is around 9 or 10am, or 2pm if they only do supper. Ask for the chef if he or she is not too busy (Know if the chef is a he or a she. Knowing the name is even better.), even if the chef is not the owner. The chef is the one making many decisions as far as food products are concerned.

☞ Presentation is important

Remember that you are dealing with a fine restaurant. It is worth putting on nice and clean "city" clothes before you go meet them. Many produc-



ers offer many new products to restaurants. Distinguish yourself: perhaps a gigot (leg of lamb) in a nice wrapping (depending on the restaurant's style), or why not do something unusual like giving the piece for free in exchange of their comments. It worked for us!

☞ Have them taste it first

The restaurant will want to know your price first, but keep an ace in your sleeve and have them taste it first! Once they realize the quality of the product they have in their hands, it will be easier to negotiate your price and conditions.

☞ Know your conditions and keep them

Do you sell whole carcasses or by pieces (which we do not)? Do you sell fresh lamb year round

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"Wait until you taste this!", cont'd

(keeping in mind it is hard to raise pasture lambs on snow)? Can you keep frozen lambs for them at your farm? Do you butcher lambs one at a time or have only one butchering in the fall? When can you start the deliveries?

☞ *Do not put all your eggs in the same basket*

If you already have clients buying meat at the farm, do not deny them in favor

of the restaurants. It is good to have many sources of income. Do not let one restaurant dictate your price just because they know they are your only customer. We like to have more than one restaurant, but we try not to have more than one in a close area.

Finally, respect yourself and your flock management. Explain it to restaurateurs; invite them to visit your farm.

If you respect who you are, they will respect it too. After all, your lambs may get you *into* fine restaurants, but the *relationship* will build fidelity.

Do we need the restaurants? No. But it is good for the ego to see the "*lamb from Le Biscornu Farm*" on the menu of that nice restaurant people keep talking about.

~ Natalie Chartier and Justin Audet, *Le Biscornu, QC*

Cooking with Lamb

Lamb is healthy and flavorful, as well as being quite easy to cook once you learn a few tricks. In addition, many of us either have a freezer full or hope to fill the freezer in the fall. There is nothing better than raising your own food, whether it be vegetables, fruit, or lamb. It comes second only to eating the food you have produced yourself at a table filled with friends. And what better way to show off your cooking skills to friends and family than with some of your own home-grown lamb!

Lamb has the ability to add a little elegance to an

everyday meal out of the crock-pot or add a lot of wow factor to a dinner gathering with family and friends. I grew up in a French influenced household where lamb was not necessarily a common dish during the week but it made some grand appearances on holidays that I will not soon forget. There was roast leg of lamb for Easter, lamb chops with wine sauce for a birthday, rack of lamb for Christmas -- a staple of family gatherings. Even as a child I always had the impression that if there was lamb in the oven, it was going to be a great dinner!

Now, as fate would have it I am a flock owner myself, and feel it is even more important to support and share traditions that I grew up with, which ultimately allow myself and fellow shepherds to raise and sell more lambs. Many flock owners are hesitant for some reason to "support their sheep habit" in the form of enjoying lamb at the table, and obviously to each their own. Just as you would not have soy milk in your fridge if you had a dairy farm, there is no reason to serve your guests tasteless chicken breast from the store

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Cooking with Lamb, *cont'd*

when you raise Icelandic sheep! Lamb consumption has been on a slow decline since World War II and I believe it stems from a number of reasons which all boils down to two reasons: bad lamb or a bad cook. We have outstanding gourmet lamb in our freezers, now we just need to make sure we are fully practiced in the kitchen or on the grill. In doing so we become our own best advertisement, and who could not use a few more lamb buyers?

Here are just a few tips that are important to keep in mind when cooking with lamb:

- Lamb chops and better cuts of lamb should be cooked medium to medium rare, period. Just as you would not request a filet mignon to be charred to well-done status, do not overcook your lamb. And if you are one of those that would cook gourmet lamb or choice beef to **noir**, then at least try your lamb cooked to perfection once. Steak tartar graces many a menu of high-end restaurants for a reason. Overcooking lamb can bring on a gamey flavor and lean towards the consistency of liver. To each their own,

however overcooking seems to be a common mistake and all too often it can turn someone off from lamb for good.

- Cut, cut, cut, and snip if you need. Cut as much of the fat off the cut of lamb as humanly possible. The fat on lamb can hold an overpowering flavor, less noticeable on grass fed animals but there all the same. Obviously there is typically less fat to begin with on a grass fed lamb, however the overall flavor of a grass fed lamb is milder. Although the fat does not always have a bad flavor to all palates, it takes away from the delicate flavor of the meat. To make this an easy task start with a sharp knife, and for rounded cuts of meat such as leg of lamb use a pair of kitchen shears to cut away the extra fat.

- Bring out the best in the cut of meat you are working with. Just as you should eat the best of what each season presents you, eating fresh strawberries in the summer and lovely Michigan apples in the fall, you should carry this thinking into your food preparation. Do not try to roast a lamb breast for a dinner party just as you should not throw a beautiful leg of

lamb into a crock-pot. Use recipes that bring out the best in the cut you are working with.

- Experiment, taste, and experiment some more. There are plenty of great lamb recipes out there, but they all certainly will not find their way onto the pages of "Cuisine Magazine" and they won't all meet your standards either. So try those recipes out, and keep trying recipes until you have found some that you love. Then you can pass these wonderful recipes on to your lamb buyers in a newsletter, a Christmas card, or via your website!

- Keep the farm dog happy too. Do not waste those cuts of meat that most of us do not find appetizing. Many pet owners are equally concerned with their pets' health as they are their own. Some of us have transitioned our house/farm pets to a raw diet, commonly called the BARF diet, a terrible acronym for Bones And Raw Foods or, as some prefer, Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods. Lamb organs as well as non-weight bearing bones and knuckle bones fit perfectly into this diet and

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Cooking with Lamb, *cont'd*

add the all important variety to the dogs' diet.

- Do not fear the grill. Yes, lamb is fantastic on the grill, and it is not just for grilled lamb burgers! Leg of lamb and rack of lamb along with a whole roast lamb can all go on the grill and come off perfectly!

- Lock in the juice. If you are working with a piece of meat that was previously frozen, make sure the cut is completely thawed. Rinse the meat, then pat dry with paper towel prior to searing. Sear-

ing your meat before roasting, grilling, or even slow cooking helps to add flavor and seal in the natural juices. Sear your lamb in a large frying pan on medium-high heat with a coating of high-temp oil such as coconut oil. I prefer coconut oil for its health benefits but any high-temp oil will work, just avoid using olive oil or something similar that could burn in the pan and give your lamb a charred flavor.

- Lamb? Yes, lamb! Most importantly, do not hesitate to serve lamb. Remember, even

if a guest claims not to enjoy lamb, they have probably never eaten Icelandic lamb, and yes, there is a difference, as we all know. You may be able to change the wary guest's perspective on lamb forever, or at least give them a chance to try it. If you do not wish to serve it as the main course, then why not try a lamb appetizer? Mini lamb burgers or lamb kabobs would be perfect for a summer gathering.

Now let's go cook some lamb!

Maple and Herbs Lamb's Rib

2	lamb rib	2	dry shallots
2 tbsp	vegetable oil (30mL)	1/3 C	pure maple syrup (75mL)
2 tbsp	butter (divided)	1 tsp	fresh thyme (finely chopped)
	salt & pepper	1 tsp	fresh rosemary (finely chopped)
1	Demi-glaze (commercial pouch)		

- ☞ Preheat oven at 375°F/190°C.
- ☞ In a pan, heat oil and half the butter. Add the lamb rib and turn so it is brown on all sides. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- ☞ Cook rib in the oven for a little less than 15 minutes. Take it out, wrap in aluminium foil, and let stand for 10 minutes before cutting into chops.
- ☞ Prepare the demi-glaze as indicated on the package but do not heat it yet.
- ☞ In a saucepan, melt butter and add dry shallots. When shallots are translucent, add the demi-glaze and the maple syrup.
- ☞ Let simmer for 10 minutes, add the herbs, and remove from the stove
- ☞ Cut the rib between bones and serve with sauce.

~ Natalie Chartier, *Le Biscornu, QC*