

Bison Stampede onto US Menus

Difficulty:

DIFFICULT

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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about the increasing interest in the US for bison meat. What is a bison? Why do more people want to eat bison meat than before? Are there any problems associated with this trend?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = Bison meat and its production.

1. What does the report tell us about bison meat?
 - 97% fat-free.
 - 40% higher in protein than beef.
 - contains more iron and potassium than pork.
 - has a sweet taste.
 - one speaker says once you've tasted it, you'll want more (it's addictive).
 - it can be used in a variety of dishes, e.g., sausages, spaghetti sauce, burgers, steaks, stew.
2. What problems are being faced by bison meat suppliers, and why?
 - demand has outgrown supply, with groceries and restaurants running out of meat.
 - a marketing campaign launched in 2001 was more successful than predicted.
 - bison farm managers like Del-Vonna Felbauer have been caught out by the increasing demand.
 - there aren't enough bison ranches to compete as an alternative source of meat.
 - since producers know they could increase meat sales, they are holding on to heifers for breeding purposes, rather than sending them for slaughter.
 - female bison need to be older than cows before they can reproduce.
 - young bison take longer to reach marketable weight than young cattle.
3. What did you learn about the National Bison Association and its efforts?
 - it was behind the successful advertising campaign.
 - it researched nutritional values and taste of bison meat.
 - it invited chefs to join the campaign (- this was what gained public interest).
 - it has launched a new campaign to increase the size of bison ranches, and to persuade cattle ranchers to switch to bison breeding.
 - its members are meeting with cattlemen to point out the advantages of raising bison.
 - producers believe the NBA's efforts will get bison supply back on track by 2014.

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Bison meat, and other less usual sources of animal protein.

1. Have you eaten bison meat yourself? Or has a close friend or family member done so, to your knowledge? When? Where? Describe the dish, and what you / they thought of it. Is bison meat available in your country?
2. The report mentions beef pork and chicken as the most usual types of meat. What other less usual animals are reared on farms across the world (goats, buffalo, kangaroo, horses, camels, ostriches, ducks, guinea fowl, quails, geese... others?) Which (if any) of these have you tried? Describe the experience to the group.
3. Other types of meat are eaten around the world, without necessarily being farmed. What examples can you think of? (snake, hippopotamus, crocodile, insects, grubs... others?) Again, tell the group of any experiences you have here, or of any television documentaries you have seen on the subject.
4. Is the eating of seafood healthy? Can it be dangerous? (Many seafoods contain healthy combinations of omega-3 and omega-6. However many feed by filtering the water around them. If this is polluted, they accumulate toxins and can poison the people who eat them. Some people are allergic to shellfish).

OR, Topic = Cooking with bison meat.

Visit this page of the National Bison Association's website.

<http://www.bisoncentral.com/cooking-bison/bison-recipes>

Look at the recipes, and choose one to describe to the group or to your teacher.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Advertising campaigns and market supply.

1. In the report, a 10-year-old advertising campaign was very successful, maybe even too successful! One ranch manager said, when retailers started facing shortages of bison meat, "This was kind of a surprise for us. No one figured we would be out of meat." Does this statement surprise you, or not? Explain your opinion.
2. Do you have personal experience of, or involvement in, advertising or marketing campaigns? When? What was the product? Was the campaign successful?
3. For what other reasons do product shortages occur? (shortage of primary resources, transport problems, natural disasters, strikes... other reasons?) Tell the group about any product shortages at your place of work, or that have affected your personal life. Why did the situation develop? How long did it last? How did it end?

Audioscript

It's a chilly dreary autumn day in Fort Wayne, Indiana, but inside the Three Rivers Café and Co-op it's warm and bright, and customers are lining up for a tasty meal.

Growing numbers of Americans are enjoying bison because it's considered more healthful than other meats. It's 40 percent higher in protein than beef, has more iron and potassium than pork, and is 97 percent fat free. It's being used in everything from sausages to spaghetti sauce, as well as burgers, steaks and stew.

In fact, it's so popular that Adalyn Parker, the meat buyer for the co-op, says there's a problem.

"In a week, we sell close to 20 packages, which is actually a pretty high number for a place like this. It's definitely increasing, enough that we need to continue to order it, but our supplier is actually out of stock of it right now until late November, because the demand is getting so high for it."

That means the co-op only has five packages left. And Three Rivers isn't the only retailer facing a shortage. All across the country, groceries and restaurants are running out of bison.

That's a great problem to have, says Del-Vonna Feldbauer, who manages Wild Winds Buffalo Preserve in Fremont, Indiana. "This was kind of a surprise for all of us. No one really figured we would be out of meat. We tried to predict how much meat we would need for the year, but unfortunately we're out a lot faster than what we thought we would be."

According to John Trippy, a retired physician who owns the Preserve, the bison industry owes much of its success to the National Bison Association. The ranchers' group launched an effective advertising campaign in 2001 promoting the meat.

"They started doing research on the nutritional values etc, and taste, and then they got chefs involved. And that awareness is what really kicked off the public's interest, and 'Oh my gosh, we have an alternative to beef or to pork or to chicken.' So in New York City, they were calling it the quote, 'sweet meat' because it has a sweet taste to it. And it's almost addictive, honestly, after you start eating it."

Bison is about twice as expensive as other meats. Still, top producers say they could easily increase sales by 30 percent, if they had the meat to sell.

While the gestation period for bison is the same as for cattle, it takes bison a full year longer to have offspring. And it takes those calves a full year longer than young cattle to gain enough weight to be ready for market. In addition, many ranchers are finding it more profitable to hold on to heifers for breeding rather than slaughter.

The other issue is there simply aren't enough bison ranches to compete head-to-head with cattle as an alternative source of meat.

"Today we have about... there are probably about 500,000 bison in the country. We slaughter 250,000 cattle every day, so it's a little, minute part of the market."

The challenge now is keeping up with the demand, so they can hold on to their small-but-growing share of the market.

The National Bison Association has launched a new campaign encouraging ranchers to increase their bison herds. To promote* cattlemen to switch to bison, association members meet with them and point out that the animals are cheaper to feed and require almost no maintenance.

If the recruitment effort is as successful as the marketing campaign was, most ranchers believe America's bison supply will be back on track by 2014.

For VOA News, I'm Erika Celeste in Freemont, Indiana.

* The speaker should say: "*persuade*".